

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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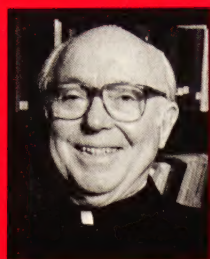
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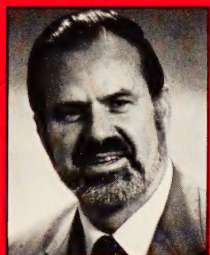




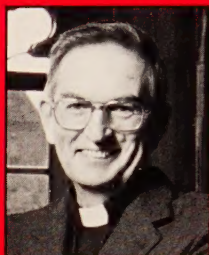
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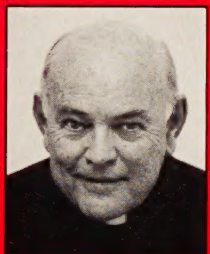
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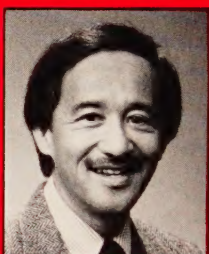
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# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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## CONTENTS

---

5

**THE SELF-ESTEEM OF WOMEN**

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

8

**OF MISSION STATEMENTS AND MISSIONS**

George B. Wilson, S.J.

12

**CHILD ABUSE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

Richard P. Vaughan, S.J., Ph.D.

17

**THE ANATOMY OF PRIESTLY MORALE**

Reverend Thomas J. Morgan, Ed.D.

22

**ARMS OUT TO YOU**

James Torrens, S.J.

24

**IT'S TIME TO REFOUND HEALTH CARE MINISTRY**

Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., Ph.D.

31

**ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION**

Maria T. Flores, C.C.V.I., Ph.D., and Thomas Picton, C.SS.R., M.Div.

37

**AN INSIDER'S SENSE OF AGING**

J. Robert Hilbert, S.J.

40

**ASSESSMENT OF MOTIVATION IN VOCATIONAL CHOICES**

Philip D. Cristantiello, Ph.D.

43

**FAMILY THEORY LENDS SUPPORT TO SPIRITUALITY**

Deacon Brian J. Kelly, Ed.D.

48

**CONFERENCE EXPLORES CRITICAL ISSUES**

Sheila M. O'Keefe, Ed.D.

---

2

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

3

**EDITOR'S PAGE**

**Do Vocations Depend on Friendship?**

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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## DO VOCATIONS DEPEND ON FRIENDSHIP?

**I**t generally takes a very long time for conventional but false beliefs about health and illness to be replaced by new and scientifically grounded insights and certainties. So you can expect the man or woman on the street to struggle for perhaps years before letting go of some of the commonly held myths that medical research has recently discovered to be entirely erroneous.

One such myth has warned us that we are likely to catch a cold if we go out on a rainy day and get our shoes and socks wet, then sit in an office or classroom for hours without taking them off and drying our feet, or without drying our wet hair. Similarly, being in a drafty location has been thought to invite a cold or, for the less fortunate, a case of pneumonia. Science now tells us that these long-popular beliefs are wrong.

Equally incorrect, research has found, is the widespread notion that there is a connection between the weather and arthritis pain. For ages, physicians told arthritic patients that changes in barometric pressure determined whether their suffering increased or decreased; now they deny that there is any scientific basis for that belief. It's going to be hard for doctors to establish the new conviction.

Another long-standing "truth" that demands prompt correction is the one about ulcers in the gastrointestinal tract being the result of emotional stress. Not so, say the researchers. The *Pylorobacter* organism is currently recognized as the culprit, and antibiotics—not stress-reduction strategies—now serve as treatment.

While considering these examples of popular medical myths that are being dispelled by scientific evidence, I found myself wondering about some of the myths most Catholics believe and perpetuate regarding vocations to priesthood and religious life. Because of the current shortage of candidates for these

roles in the church, I've been asking people what they think it takes to attract a young man or woman into such totally dedicated service to God and neighbor. Most laypersons have said they believe that a deep faith in God, fidelity to a life of prayer, and a strong desire to be of service to others are the factors that prompt individuals to enter seminaries or houses of religious formation and enable those individuals to persevere for a lifetime.

Surprisingly, however—in talking with priests and members of religious congregations who have remained aboard throughout the relentless storms that have tossed "Peter's bark" since the Second Vatican Council—I've frequently heard a different explanation for their responding and remaining faithful to their calling. What they report is not a scientific conclusion; a carefully executed research project would be needed to establish that. But many if not most of these ecclesial veterans, after careful reflection upon their own spiritual lives, have come to hold a common belief about the deeper truth regarding their vocations. In brief, they have reached an awareness that friendship brought them into a seminary or a novitiate, and friendship has enabled them to persevere. Again and again, when vocations have been the topic—whether in private conversations or in group discussions among clergy and religious—I've heard men and women say that a friendship with an older person who was obviously happy as a priest or vowed religious attracted them initially, and a close friendship (or several) made possible their continuing on, no matter how many of their brothers or sisters dropped out along the way. Many confessed that in times of frustration, disappointment, or disillusionment, they probably would have left the priesthood or their religious congregation had it not been for the emotional support they received from one or more companion-friends.

For our readers who are religious or priests, it might be an interesting exercise to spend a few hours—perhaps on a quiet summer evening or during a retreat, and preferably with a friend—seeking answers to the following questions: Did friendship have an



influence on my entering the priesthood or my religious community? Has friendship contributed to my perseverance until now? Who are some of the friends who have influenced my life, and in what way are they important to my vocation?

I strongly recommend "Friendship in Jesuit Life: The Joys, the Struggles, the Possibilities"—a thoughtful and insightful article by Charles M. Shelton, S.J., published in the series of Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits—to those who wish to pursue further the topic of friendship in relation to vocations. Shelton, a clinical psychologist on the faculty of Regis University (Denver, Colorado), observes that "the deep emotional bond experienced from personal friendship energizes members' commitment and maintains their brotherhood or sisterhood." He writes that friendships among religious are "a source of joy, trust, and hope, yet also . . . occasions for hurt, loss, and disappointment." I have seen Shelton's article used in group discussions by priests and members of religious communities, and the results have been striking. It is my impression that priests and religious who are not Jesuits find Father Shelton's ideas and challenges just as useful and informative as do his fellow Jesuits.

Shelton's description of "Jesuit friendship" can readily be extrapolated to similar relationships in other contexts: it is "a relatively long, enduring, and freely chosen emotional attachment between one Jesuit and another; it arises out of their shared life histories together. The one Jesuit appreciates the other as a unique person who cannot be replaced by another Jesuit or any other person." He explains that

"the relationship of such Jesuit friends incorporates mutual affection, trust, and intimacy, while sustaining each one's desire and efforts to be of service to the Kingdom."

To his brother Jesuits, Shelton points out that "perhaps at no time in our history has the focus on healthy friendship building become so important and necessary to nurture and maintain our vocations and the Society's apostolic vision." It may well be important for members of all religious congregations, along with diocesan clergy, to consider and discuss his message in relation to their own vocations and ministry. Let's ask ourselves, "Does friendship play a role in my perseverance and in the enthusiasm I bring to my life of service?" Reflecting on that question might lead us to recognize that something important was left out of the old myth that prayer and closeness to God alone provide sufficient support for our vocations. It might also help us understand more clearly how God operates in our lives.

And what about the relationship between friendships and the recruitment of new members for the clergy and religious congregations? Let's all think about that one for a while. We might discover why there are not more candidates knocking on the doors of our seminaries and novitiates today.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

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*For information about the Institute, please see the back cover of this issue.*



# The Self-Esteem of Women

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D

**T**hat women have lower self-esteem than men is one of the sex-role stereotypes cited by Robert L. Gibson and Marianne H. Mitchell in their book *Introduction to Counseling and Guidance*. Is that perception accurate, or does it merely reflect our collusion with the dominant system, which perpetuates such stereotypes through sexism and oppression?

In this article I explore the problem of low self-esteem in women and how it interfaces with the issue of female identity. I define self-esteem, highlight the relationship between gender and self-esteem, and explore the negative ramifications of sex-role stereotyping.

## IDENTITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

Our *identity* (from the Latin *idem*, meaning "the same") is who we are. Our identity can be identical to our thoughts and behavior. We act out of who we think we are. What we think of who we are is our self-esteem: an overall sense of self-worth, love, and respect. In *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, Nathaniel Branden defines it as a person's estimation of herself or himself. Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning, authors of *Self-Esteem*, call it "essential for psychological survival" and relate it to "the ability to form an identity and then attach a value to it."

In their book *Women and Self-Esteem*, Linda Tschirhart Sanford and Mary Ellen Donovan explain that self-esteem is both specific and global. It is related to who I am in the physical, sexual, social, emotional, intellectual, personal, religious, and spiritual components of my totality. Thus, I may approve of myself globally, but in a specific situation I may feel less than adequate.

Self-esteem is not something we are born with; it is our feelings of personal worth and competence—our inner reputation—as learned early in life from significant others, the external sources of self-esteem. How significant others treated us, particularly what they told us about ourselves and how they labeled us, helped form the "baseline" for our self-esteem by the time we were about 5 years of age. As Sanford and Donovan point out, because we didn't have the verbal or formal logic skills to engage in dialogue with significant others about their observations and reactions when we were that young, "their judgments became reality to us." Thus, the formation of our self-esteem could be summed up by the adage "Saying makes it so."

## GENDER AND SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem—and, more to the point, negative or low self-esteem—affects everybody, male and fe-



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## Men and women must continue to challenge each other to take risks in working together to eliminate oppressive stereotypes and sexism

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male. Having said that, I hasten to add that primarily women attend workshops on self-esteem. There are probably many reasons for the preponderance of women attending such workshops. I could suggest several; one is that women tend to go to more self-help and skills-training sessions than men do. They enjoy the sharing and connectedness that can be derived within these contexts. Another possibility is that in general, women do in fact have lower self-esteem than men and therefore have a greater need for the workshops. Still another could be that men find sharing in groups intimidating because of their cultural training to be self-sufficient, separate, and objective. No matter what the reasons are, having listened to so many women's stories, I see a connection between many women's low self-esteem and how they've been valued in society. This interfaces with how women and men have been socialized and stereotyped as females and males.

### SEX-ROLE TRAINING

Sanford and Donovan note that "a woman who is taught from childhood that she is of less value than males easily may come to believe it, and her lack of faith in her own value makes it easier for others to keep her down—down being her 'proper place.'" The dualistic socialization and sex-role stereotyping in patriarchal, hierarchical cultures has stultified the growth of both genders, but in vastly different ways. Men have been trained to be superior, rational, active, objective, separate, dominant, and the norm, whereas women have been trained to be inferior, emotional, passive, subjective, connected, and sub-

ordinate. This system has negatively affected both men and women—but particularly women, because of their inferior and subordinate role.

In *Women's Reality*, Anne Wilson Schaef calls this dualistic system the "white male system." Four myths are integral to its functioning:

1. This system is the only one that exists; the others are not real.
2. It is innately superior.
3. It knows and understands everything.
4. It is possible to be totally rational, logical, and objective.

In connection with women's low self-esteem in such a system, I would like to explore two related phenomena.

### IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

Today most women work outside the home in various types of employment. Because of their gender, their work is often undervalued and underpaid. As Colette Dowling notes in *The Cinderella Complex*, a study showed that for every dollar earned by male employees in the United States, female workers with equal training and experience earn about 64 cents.

Also, women face limited opportunities for advancement in professional careers. Take the American public school system. Despite signs of gradual change, most of today's teachers are women, and most of the principals are men. Or consider the system of tenure for university professors. I know female academics who have been trying for several years to get tenure under harrowing circumstances, while their male colleagues have attained tenure more readily and easily.

The "impostor syndrome," identified by Pauline Rose Clance and Maureen Ann O'Toole, is connected to women and achievement generally, and to the above examples specifically. Initially, Clance and O'Toole focused their research totally on women. They found that because of a lack of self-identity and positive self-esteem, some successful women felt, deep down, that they were impostors and frauds. They felt that they succeeded only because of their charm, style, sex appeal, or some fluke. Unconvinced that their gifts and talents accounted for their success, they feared that they would soon be exposed as fakes.

My interpretation of the impostor syndrome is that successful women have felt a lack of inner congruence because, in order to succeed in a patriarchal society, they have had to buy into the values of the male-dominated system; at the same time, they have come to fully believe the negative sex-role stereo-



types in which they have been trained. This dilemma accounts, at least in part, for their not having a true sense of their own identity, gifts, and talents.

Gibson and Mitchell enumerate some of the stereotypes about women, which some women unfortunately accept because of their socialization: Women "lack achievement motivation"; they are "more passive," "more dependent," "more fearful, timid and anxious," "more emotional," and "more compliant"; they "demonstrate more nurturing behaviour." In contrast, stereotypes about men imply that "male" traits are the norm: they are "dominant," "more analytic," "more competitive," "more aggressive," and "more active." I think one reason women attend self-esteem workshops is to grapple with their turmoil over who they are and how they value themselves.

## CINDERELLA COMPLEX

A second phenomenon connected to this dualistic system and its effect on women's self-esteem is the "Cinderella complex," defined by Colette Dowling as "a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity." Dowling adds that "like Cinderella, some women today are still waiting for something external to transform their lives." These women find it easy to subscribe to the psychological dependency of being taken care of (usually financially) by someone else.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

I think there is a light at the end of the dark tunnel of low self-esteem, if men and women will work together on the problem. First, it is paramount that the two genders continue to raise their consciousness about the white male system, which has affected the self-esteem of both. Second, men and women must

continue to challenge each other to take risks in working together to eliminate oppressive stereotypes and sexism. This means transforming "power over" to "power with." Third, both women and men should take advantage of self-esteem workshops to learn skills for counteracting the pathological internal critic that constantly berates them and promotes such negative behaviors as overgeneralization, polarized thinking, and self-blame.

In the end, healthy self-esteem has no gender. It is all about learning how to have more self-awareness, self-acceptance in one's finiteness and incompleteness, and self-assertion in taking responsibility for one's life.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Branden, N. *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*. New York, New York: Bantam, 1969.
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# Of Mission Statements and Missions

*George B. Wilson, S.J.*

**M**ission statements are “in.” As we gradually become more aware that the organizations in which we invest a lot of our lives need to be able to define themselves, to clarify their identity and purposes, it seems that writing mission statements is the logical thing to do. These days, we encounter mission statements everywhere: parishes have them, schools have them, health care and social service agencies have them. You might even see one on the wall at the XYZ Widget Corporation.

Granted, composing a mission statement can be a salutary exercise for a group of people that has been drifting aimlessly or even pulling itself apart. But experience indicates that there are some more foundational things people need to be clear about before jumping into the effort: Just what *is* a mission statement? What is its purpose? What can it do, and what can't it do, for a group of people?

## **A STATEMENT IS NOT A MISSION**

Maybe the best place to start is to acknowledge a paradoxical phenomenon that is all too common: an organization's development of a mission statement without having a mission. That phenomenon can make us think more profoundly about what a mission statement is—and what it is not.

People often fail to see that a mission statement is only a statement—a declaration, a set of words. And like any set of words, it may represent and communicate many different things.

It may be helpful to consider mission statements from the perspective of sacramentality. In a very real sense, a group's mission statement is a sacrament. It's a public expression intended to disclose something interior, and by the very disclosing confirm the identity already present.

The hitch is that sacramental signs can be misleading, even fraudulent. People bring children to be baptized for all sorts of reasons—perhaps “to please Mom and Dad,” perhaps because people in their family have always done it, perhaps because of a superstition that God will zap them if they don't—but with no intention of committing themselves to the Lord or to a community of people. People go to confession with no interior disposition to be reconciled; they take the marriage vow without the foggiest idea of what “sickness” and “poorer” and “till death do us part” might entail. Any good sacramental theology must reckon with the reality of countersacraments—meaningless signs.

Groups can create mission statements that are just as empty. Sit in the faculty room of a school or the employees' snack bar at a hospital and listen to the



commentary: "If I have to look at one more plaque on the wall proclaiming this place's commitment to 'the dignity of the human person' or 'compassionate caring,' I'm going to barf." One might wish that such remarks were only manifestations of the employees' "grumble factor," serving as a harmless way to blow off steam when work becomes more than usually stressful. All too often, however, such comments express valid criticism of institutions that have lofty rhetoric unmatched by institutional behavior.

That is not to say that human declarations, including mission statements, can't be enormously powerful. Millions of people throughout the world build their whole lives around their trust in Jesus' promise, "I will always be with you." But we must acknowledge the limitation in all human promises, especially when they are idealistic, as mission statements tend to be.

If it's possible to have a mission statement without having a mission, then perhaps we need to dig a bit deeper to discover the relationship between a mission statement and the reality it is attempting to express. Our lack of clarity about mission may account, in part, for the creation of empty mission statements.

How to begin? I'd suggest that we might help ourselves by examining expressions we use in everyday speech. We might say of someone, "He's on a mission; he is determined to make the Olympic team"; or "Her mission was to get into nursing school, and nothing was going to stop her." Considering the meaning of such ordinary statements can help us tease out some of the factors involved in having or being on a mission.

## FOCUS IS NECESSARY

One of the first things that strikes you about someone who genuinely has a sense of mission is that he or she is focused. Organizational writing today contains a lot of references to focus. The FORUS (Future of Religious Orders in the United States) study of religious congregations asserts strongly that only organizations with a clear focus will make it through the current period of change. Focus is an important concept; we need to work hard to keep the term from becoming just another in the list of buzzwords that flash across our mental skies like meteors, dazzling for the moment but quickly overtaken by the next spectacle.

Having a focus is not a matter of coming up with slogans; it's hard work. The fellow trying to make the Olympic team and the young woman struggling to get into nursing school have to concentrate human energies. When you're getting out of bed at 5 a.m. to go to the gym for a three-hour practice involving endless repetitions of difficult and perhaps painful

routines, or when you're trying to squeeze in some studying in the few quiet hours between putting your kids to bed and waking them up for school, numerous alternatives can look very attractive. Their allure seems almost to be enhanced by the height of your goal: the higher the goal, the more costly the effort, and the better the alternatives look.

People on a mission have to attend to what they are aiming at. They can't be distracted. Listen to the broadcast commentary on any sporting event and notice how often you hear remarks like, "she's becoming a little unfocused; she needs to forget the mistake on the last point and get back to the strategy that got her here." Momentary loss of concentration can mean the loss of momentum or the loss of the match. All good sports training has moved from teaching the external mechanics of the play to teaching the discipline of inner imaging: See clearly enough what a successful play will feel like, and your body will follow the image. Lose concentration, and even the most gifted athletic body will be of no avail.

The image behind the language of focusing can help. It comes from the mechanics of sight and of the camera, which tries to capture reality. In both instances, focusing implies sorting out what will be in the foreground, or highlighted, from what will be relegated to the background. If you take a photo that encompasses a broad horizon, you won't be able to make out all the details of the scene clearly; if you take a close-up shot of one part of the scene, you'll sacrifice the clarity of its other elements. In the realm of sound, focus means the difference between what is genuine sound, conveying meaning, and what is merely static, communicating nothing.

People on a mission are clear about what is important and central and contributes to forward movement, and what is merely background. Having focus means being clear about the difference between purposes and the means employed to achieve them. For groups that may have a mission statement but no mission, all sorts of extraneous stuff occupies the foreground; trying to interpret what is only static, they lose track of any melody.

## THE POWER OF "NO"

Perhaps the most important reason for having a focused mission is that it means being clear about what you're *not* trying to be or do. It is the "no" that harnesses energy and keeps it from being dissipated in efforts to be something for which the group is not suited. The "no" creates a boundary (which is really the image behind *definition*) within which energy can be concentrated. You don't really know what you are assenting to unless you know its limits.



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## Too many group mission statements are generic—what lawyers call boilerplate

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Let me offer two concrete examples of focused mission. Jesuit Brother Rick Curry founded and leads a highly effective project, the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped. Through it, persons with severe disabilities create and perform excellent theatrical works across the United States and Canada. Knowing only this about the project, what do you think is its mission? You may be surprised when you read Rick's response to a comment by Tom Peters, the management guru, in an interview. Peters observed that Rick is very demanding of his performers. Rick replied, "I'm not running a social agency; this is a professional theater company. People are going to pay good money to see a quality show, and they have a right to it." Rick knows what his mission is—and what it is not. Other institutions will have to do the social work.

Another example: Wilmington College is a small institution north of Cincinnati, Ohio. Its administrators analyzed what the school is equipped to do, and they discovered that it is good at taking kids from small rural communities, from families in which no one has ever gone through college, and showing that they can do competent bachelor-level work. The poster they use to advertise the school reads, across the top, "You Could Go to College with Everybody" (meaning attending one of the big, impersonal schools)—and, across the bottom, "Wilmington College: Not for Everybody."

Can your parish / school / health care facility say what it does *not* aim to be or do? If not, determining the "no" is well worth the effort. A lot of grief can be avoided if someone says *before* the wedding, "I don't do windows."

## ENERGY FROM CHOICE

One thing that emerges from conversation with people on a mission is that they are working at that mission because they chose it. Some individuals may seem to be on a mission, yet they are actually being pushed along by, say, a parent; such people won't really carry out the mission, because they do not want it badly enough themselves. There has to be drive in the individual on a mission, because it takes determination to overcome the obstacles that inevitably confront anyone trying to do something different.

People with drive exhibit enormous resourcefulness. They get started in one direction, but when they hit a roadblock, they simply zig, zag, or even back-track to create a new opening. They will not be deterred. Their eyes are so focused on the prize that being diverted doesn't diminish their commitment. Achieving the goal may take longer, but they're in for the long haul. Instead of backing away when the initial results are disappointing, they up the ante.

Nor are they driven by "shoulds." They want something badly enough to pay a price. Listen to Jesus' parables; they're all about desire—pearls, and lost coins, and fishing all night for a catch, and returning home because banquets are better than hog slop. They're about passion, not about assuaging guilt.

Too often, mission statements bear the unmistakable aroma of guilt. We'll say we're for the poor, because we know we "should" be—not because they're flesh of our flesh, because they're us, because we want our flesh honored and not disfigured.

## MISSION IS UNIQUE

People on a mission are unique. To return to an earlier example, it's not a question of a generic "housewife-seeking-nursing-degree." It's *this* woman, with *this* husband and *these* kids, and *these* strengths and limitations, trying to get into *this* nursing school at *this* point in her life. She's not looking over her shoulder at other women, asking what they're aiming at. The energy and fire and conviction are within her, making her determined to confront *her* demons and move *her* mountains.

Too many group mission statements are generic—what lawyers call boilerplate. If a particular parish community works two to three years to construct its mission statement, and that statement finally reads something like, "We are Catholic Christians called to proclaim the gospel through word and worship and service," one could be pardoned for asking, with Peggy Lee, "Is that all there is?" It's not that the description isn't grand (in fact, it may be too grand,



inviting later disillusionment); it's just that it fits us all. It has none of the incarnational uniqueness that constitutes *that* community's uniqueness.

A better mission statement might be more modest and more authentic. Perhaps, "We're a tough bunch of mining folk struggling with the demands of an inclusive gospel in the face of militant racism and an antigovernment town. Our mission—for a long time to come—will be to use all the toughness that characterizes our heritage while developing vulnerability and sensitivity and neighborliness to people who harbor deep hostility in their blood." Or, "We are a deeply wounded community. Our mission for the next five years will be to support and help one another and our children to recover trust in one another, in our church, and in the Lord after the painful discovery of pedophilia in a beloved pastor."

The mission statement of Saint Hildegard's should be different from that of Holy Cross, the parish (or hospital or school) a few blocks over. It's got different people, and a different story, and a different set of surrounding conditions, and a different set of obstacles to overcome. And five years from now, even Saint Hildegard's unique mission statement should feel outdated; much will have changed in that time, and those changes should cause rethinking and refocusing. The statement should be different in five years because the mission will have become different. The mission statement of a particular parochial school twenty years ago, when all its students came from Catholic families, would have said something about "handing on the Catholic faith to our children." Today, with 80 percent of its students non-Catholic, the school no longer has that mission; now its mission is "evangelization—showing those who don't belong to our faith the church's concern, even for the most disadvantaged kids in our city."

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Now we may be in a position to know what we shouldn't expect to result from the creation of a mission statement. No mission statement will manufacture desire and determination; sacraments aren't magic. The desire to fulfill the mission has to be present already. When we have the requisite energy and

passion, and when we want to be sure it gets expended on the greater good, we work at claiming our uniqueness and focusing on our target and naming what we won't try to do.

Effort at uncovering where our passion lies, what would excite and move us to commitment, comes first. Energies have to be tapped, and that involves conversion—listening to our hearts in light of the Lord's gifts and words. The sense of mission begins with the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Were not our hearts on fire . . . ?"

Like participating authentically in other sacraments, working at drafting a mission statement can be enormously energizing if the body is prepared to struggle with a work of art. It can make a group ask questions, and that can create the possibility of conversion. Creating a mission statement involves answering such questions as, What kind of people are we, really? What has shaped us—or deformed us? What patterns are important to us, and what is just unexamined custom? What experiences ground our conviction that we have a task in front of us that no one else can do for us? What makes us, and therefore our call and gift, different? What do we want so badly that we're willing to say no to other attractive possibilities? What dreams are so compelling to us that we will fight for them?

If the total membership of a group participates in genuinely addressing such questions, there's a good chance that the grace of mission might just explode within them. There's also a reasonable chance that their mission statement will look quite different from what they anticipated when they began the exercise. It won't be boilerplate. And you won't find people griping about it in the cafeteria; they'll be too invested in searching out ways to make it happen to have time for that.



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# Child Abuse and Its Consequences

*Richard P. Vaughan, S.J., Ph.D.*

**L**ast year, newspapers across the country carried a photograph of six-year-old Elisa Izquierdo's body, lying in a coffin surrounded by flowers and teddy bears. Over the course of almost two years, Elisa was maltreated and abused by her drug-addicted mother and, finally, killed by having her head smashed against the living room wall. On the cover of a December 1995 issue of *Time* magazine, Elisa's picture appeared with the caption "A Shameful Death: Let down by the system, murdered by her mom, a little girl symbolizes America's failure to protect its children."

## PREVALENCE OF ABUSE

Elisa was but one of well over a million children in the United States who each year suffer physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse, the majority of which goes unnoticed and unreported. A survey by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services indicates that the annual number of abused and neglected children has more than doubled in the past decade, from 1.4 to 2.9 million. The number of children who are seriously injured by abuse, the department says, has quadrupled, from 143,000 to 572,000. Abuse and neglect are the leading causes of death among children under the age of four, and account

for the greatest number of the 2,000 deaths each year of children of all ages.

## IN THE NAME OF DISCIPLINE

A recent Gallup Poll asked a thousand American parents about their views on disciplining their children. The poll revealed that 5 percent of the respondents physically abused their children in the name of discipline. These parents stated that they slapped, punched, kicked, threw to the floor, and/or hit their children with a hard instrument (e.g., belt, hairbrush, or coat hanger) on parts of their bodies other than their bottoms. By law, most states consider the abovementioned forms of punishment to be child abuse. When these statistics are extrapolated to the general population, they indicate that some three million children are victims of child abuse each year in the name of discipline.

## FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse takes three forms: physical abuse and neglect, psychological abuse (sometimes called emotional abuse), and sexual abuse. This article deals with neglect and physical and psychological abuse, and points out the effects of childhood neglect and abuse on the adult personality.



Physical abuse is any kind of physical injury inflicted on a child by other than accidental means. Neglect is the failure, either intentional or unintentional, to provide a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and/or supervision, with the consequence that the child's health and development are impaired. When classified as a form of child abuse, neglect constitutes 63 percent of all reported cases of abuse.

The law defines abuse as "intentionally or recklessly causing or attempting to cause bodily injury to another person." In the case of children, bodily injury is inflicted by shaking, slapping, or twisting limbs (especially damaging to infants); beating with a whip, stick, or hard object; digging into the flesh with a sharp object (this was done over twenty times to Elisa Izquierdo); burning with a lighted cigarette or causing rope burns by tying up tightly; cutting with a knife or razor; suffocating with a pillow; or throwing onto the floor, against a wall, or down a stairway.

## THE LAW AND CHILD ABUSE

Usually, the signs of physical abuse are discovered by an examining physician or nurse, a staff member in a hospital or clinic, or a school nurse or teacher. By state law, physicians, nurses, social workers, marriage and family counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, school principals and administrators, teachers and teacher's aides, and administrators of children's day camps are required to report to a local child protective agency or police department any signs of abuse or suspected abuse. All states have laws that mandate official reporting of all forms of child abuse, with "child" defined as anyone under the age of 18.

In the case of Elisa Izquierdo, teachers and school authorities reported abuse no less than eight times. The city agency did not follow up on some of the reports because it lacked adequate staff to deal with the high volume of child abuse cases. When the agency did follow up, the social worker assigned to Elisa's case decided that there was no need for further action at the time.

## WHO IS THE ABUSER?

In most cases of physical and emotional abuse, the abuser is either a parent, a parent substitute, or occasionally an older brother, sister, or relative, such as an uncle or aunt. Abuse by a primary caregiver, such as a parent or foster parent, is the most detrimental to a child because of the child's dependence on that individual. Most abusers are not mentally ill, but many are deficient in social skills and have trouble controlling their tempers. Child abuse is more likely

to happen when a parent or parent substitute is under great stress or in a deteriorating marriage; if a child is unwanted or the result of an unwanted pregnancy; if the delivery was stressful; or if the child has a behavioral or learning difficulty.

Parents who abuse their children by neglect are usually less depressed, anxious, and angry than parents who physically abuse their children. They are, however, more prone to be immature and lacking in self-esteem. They seem unable to plan ahead and to make decisions when dealing with their children. Their neglect of their children results from their own personal inadequacies rather than from a loss of control or impulsive behavior.

## TYPICAL ABUSER

The typical abuser is immature, impulsive, self-centered, and has limited self-control. Studies show that abusers are people prone to depression and anxiety. They are insular, alienated, unhappy individuals who are dissatisfied with the way they relate with other people. A number of abusers are addicted to alcohol or narcotics or are sexually promiscuous, have had several marriages or sexual partnerships, and have engaged in minor criminal activities. A third of all abusers were themselves abused as children or adolescents. Abusive parents or caregivers are more likely to abuse boys than girls. Some abuse all their children, while others focus on one child who may provoke their anger and dislike.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT

Psychological abuse or maltreatment, sometimes called emotional abuse, includes acts of both commission and omission. More complex than physical abuse, psychological abuse is more difficult to define and is usually not covered by law. Psychological abuse is an assault on a child that adversely affects his or her emotional and social development. Psychological neglect is any kind of behavior that deprives a child of what he or she needs for intellectual, emotional, and social development.

Psychological abuse may be either verbal or non-verbal; that is, it can result either from a verbal assault upon a child or from a rejecting, hostile attitude toward a child. In its verbal form, psychological abuse can consist of "putting down" a child by constantly harping on his or her failures and defects, frequently referring to the child in a derogatory way (e.g., calling the child "stupid" or "a creep"), or berating, humiliating, and demeaning the child when he or she does not live up to parental expectations.



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**In most cases,  
abusive parents or  
parent substitutes are  
not aware that what  
they are doing is  
harmful**

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## **FORMS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE**

Psychological maltreatment can take any of the following five forms:

**Rejecting:** refusing to acknowledge the child's worth and his or her legitimate needs.

**Isolating:** cutting the child off from normal social contacts, preventing the child from forming friendships, and making the child believe that his or her family is the only safe place, thus causing the child to feel alone in a hostile world.

**Terrorizing:** verbally assaulting the child, creating a climate of fear, bullying and frightening the child, and making the child believe that the world is a hostile, unfriendly place.

**Ignoring:** depriving the child of essential stimulation and experiences, and stifling normal emotional growth and intellectual development.

**Corrupting:** encouraging antisocial behavior, reinforcing delinquency, and causing the child to deviate from acceptable social behavior.

## **AN EXAMPLE**

Mr. E, an accountant, is the father of three children—two boys, ages 12 and 15, and a 10-year-old girl. He is respected by his peers in the firm, but he is known to have a terrible temper when crossed. A couple of years ago, his wife left him and their three children because she could no longer endure his tirades when

she failed to deal with the household chores and the children as her husband demanded. Before his wife left, Mr. E had taken over all but a few of her domestic duties, including all the shopping and disciplining of the children.

Mr. E was a perfectionist, and he demanded nothing less than the best from himself, his former wife, and their three children. There was no room for ever making a mistake. When his wife and children failed to live up to his expectations, he berated or lashed out at them. Much of the time, Mr. E appeared to be stern and angry.

Occasionally, he struck the boys with his fist when they misbehaved, or beat them with a belt on their bottoms, legs, and back, which caused welts and bruises. An angry tongue-lashing accompanied each physical assault. He never struck his 10-year-old daughter, but he verbally assaulted and terrified her whenever she failed to act the way he wanted.

It should be noted that each of the three children reacted differently to their father's abuse, according to his or her personality strengths and weaknesses. The older boy became sullen and defiant, hated his father, and was often in trouble at school. The younger boy—a good athlete (which pleased his father) with many friends—spent much of his time visiting with his classmates and playing baseball. School was easy for him, and he had learned how to stay out of the way of his father's violent temper. The girl, on the other hand, terrified of her father, was anxious, withdrawn, and lacked self-esteem and self-confidence.

## **WHO ARE THE ABUSED?**

Children between the ages of 6 and 10 are the most frequently abused. Boys outnumber girls by three or four to one. Preschool children are less likely to be abused than older children, but the statistics behind this assertion may not be valid, because preschool children are less likely to talk about abuse than older youngsters. The incidence of abuse is lowest in infants, but physical abuse to infants can be the most harmful because of their fragility; babies' bones are easily broken, and their muscles are easily torn.

Children from low-income families in which the parents have limited education, few employment skills, and marital discord are most apt to be victims of abuse. By far, the majority of abusive acts happen at times when a parent or parent substitute is under great stress or loses control while disciplining a child.

## **KINDS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE**

Psychological abuse may take the form of a parent's repeatedly showing dislike for one child and



belittling that child or comparing him or her unfavorably with a more gifted sibling. Another form of psychological abuse is being overly solicitous and anxious about a child's safety, so that the child never has the opportunity to strike out on his or her own and learn how to be independent of the parent. Some parents keep their children isolated from any situation in which they might possibly be hurt, thus depriving them of the freedom needed for normal social and emotional development.

Still another form of psychological abuse is perpetrated by the overly demanding parent who wants a child to achieve at a level far beyond his or her capacity. In some cases, no matter what the child does, it is never good enough. Because approval and affirmation are seldom (if ever) given, the child grows up lacking self-esteem and self-confidence.

### **LACK OF INSIGHT**

In most cases, abusive parents or parent substitutes are not aware that what they are doing is harmful to a child or will adversely affect that child in the future. Frequently, when abusive parents are confronted about physically harming a child, they have a ready explanation for the injury—for example, "He must have fallen down while riding his tricycle; since he didn't complain, we didn't notice he had broken his arm." Often, the parent who brings an injured child to a clinic or doctor's office does not seem to be the type of person who would be an abuser, and the examining professional does not probe sufficiently to determine how the child got hurt. Some abusive parents simply deny any knowledge of the abuse or their complicity in it. Often, it is only through extended counseling that such parents or caregivers come to acknowledge that they have indeed abused a child.

### **ABUSED THEMSELVES**

Research shows that a third of all abused children have parents who themselves were abused in childhood. On the other hand, some individuals who were abused as youngsters are extremely careful to avoid inflicting on their own children the kind of abuse to which they were subjected.

Not all people who were abused as children suffer negative effects of the abuse as adults. Even individuals who were severely abused as children can grow up to be emotionally healthy, productive individuals. Often in such cases, the impact of the abuse is offset by an older person—perhaps a teacher, the mother or father of a friend, or a next-door neighbor—who takes the abused child under his or her wing and

forms a healthy, loving relationship with the youngster. Such an individual can make a great difference in an abused person's life.

Whether the damage due to abuse persists into adulthood depends on a number of factors, including the disposition and personality of the abused child, his or her relationships with siblings, how he or she relates to peers, the number of positive life experiences the child has had, whether he or she has had an opportunity to form a healing relationship with an adult, and whether the child and his or her caregiver received psychological treatment.

### **IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF ABUSE**

The behavioral symptoms of child abuse and neglect may appear shortly after a number of abusive episodes and may persist through much of the victim's childhood, only to disappear when he or she gets older. On the other hand, these symptoms may persist into adulthood, to be expressed in more adult ways.

Some children who have been abused or neglected become withdrawn and depressed, cease to play with other children, and spend endless hours alone, reading or watching television. Others go in the opposite direction, becoming overly aggressive and combative, and focusing their anger or rage on other children. Some physically abused children, especially boys, get into frequent fights, exhibit behavior problems at school, and may even engage in minor criminal activity.

### **LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF ABUSE**

One of the lasting consequences of childhood abuse is the disruption of normal emotional and social development, which may cause an individual to suffer any of several types of emotional and mental disorders, such as anorexia or conduct disorders, as an adult. People who were abused and neglected as children may manifest any of the following problems as adults: a limited sense of self-worth and self-esteem; feelings of social inadequacy; an inability to cope with stress; a high level of anxiety; a tendency to become depressed; feelings of loneliness, alienation, and isolation; repressed anger; internalized rage; intense jealousy and possessiveness; and heightened aggressive behavior. These problems can affect the way people act and relate to themselves and to the world in which they live, and can be the root of adult mental and emotional illness. These long-term effects of childhood abuse can be handicapping, keeping an individual from realizing his or her potential.



## NEED FOR LONG-TERM RESEARCH

To date, research on how childhood abuse and neglect affect the adult personality is limited. Compared with research on cancer, heart disease, and AIDS, research on the physical and psychological effects of child abuse and neglect is minuscule. Moreover, much of the research on child abuse involves data on patients at psychiatric hospitals and clinics who are being treated for problems other than abuse. Usually, such information is gathered from people who report having been abused during childhood or early adolescence, but often the connection between the abuse in youth and the symptoms in adulthood is not clear. Long-term research that traces the development of many individuals from the time of childhood abuse through adulthood is quite limited.

## McCORD RESEARCH

The longitudinal research of Joan McCord (Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is an exception. In McCord's study, which began in the 1940s, 253 male subjects were tested and interviewed when they were between the ages of 5 and 9. Forty years later, McCord followed up on 98 percent of them by personally contacting those subjects who were still alive or by interviewing relatives of those who were deceased. The study reported that 45 percent of the abused subjects had been convicted of serious crimes, become alcoholics, developed "mental illness," or died prematurely. The remaining 55 percent had led relatively normal, productive lives, or at least had seemed to show no effects of having suffered from abuse in childhood or adolescence. What we can take from McCord's longitudinal study is that childhood abuse can have handicapping or even devastating effects in later life, but not necessarily in all cases.

## FAILURE AND POOR SELF-CONCEPT

Many adults who were abused as children fail to live up to their intellectual potential. During their school years, they do not achieve according to their ability, have learning difficulties, and often are at the bottom of their class. As a consequence of their repeated failure, both in and out of school, and their frequently being considered inferior to others, they tend to become adults who are wanting in self-confidence, have a poor opinion of themselves, and engage in a type of work beneath their ability.

Some adults who were physically abused or neglected as children are prone to high levels of anxiety

and repeated bouts of depression. They tend either to be withdrawn and lacking in social skills or to be overly aggressive, impulsive, and given to antisocial behavior. Many people abused or neglected in childhood have limited self-esteem, poor impulse control, and difficulty in forming meaningful relationships. Some have self-hatred and a tendency to harm themselves (e.g., by cutting their arms or legs with a razor blade) or are suicidal. Only a small percentage of abused people, however, become psychotic.

## TREATMENT FOR ABUSED PERSONS

Not all people who have experienced abuse or neglect as children have damaged personalities as adults, but those who do have damaged personalities need professional help. Psychotherapy, both individual and group, is the usual treatment for people who were abused in childhood.

The suffering experienced by victims of child abuse often makes it difficult for them to form good relationships with others. One of the first and essential elements of psychotherapy for a childhood abuse victim is for the therapist to establish a positive working relationship with that individual. Usually, such a relationship is established only after much testing and a long effort to convince the abused person that he or she is not going to be hurt again. The therapist must be seen by the patient as reliable, dependable, and worthy of trust—characteristics not displayed by the patient's abusive caregiver during his or her childhood.

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# The Anatomy of Priestly Morale

*Reverend Thomas J. Morgan, Ed.D.*

**A**ll of us know that priests get a lot of media coverage these days. They are mysterious and interesting subjects for newspaper and magazine articles, as well as television and radio talk shows. Priests merit all this attention because they continue to be essential to the life and health of our society.

## PEOPLE'S VISION

With restless hearts, people look to priests for spiritual values, peace, freedom, and forgiveness. They invite priests to celebrate the important and touching times in their lives. They allow priests to enter into their sufferings and joys, their despairs and hopes. Priests represent to them a better quality of life, grounded in faith, hope, and love.

People want to listen to priests. They want to be in tune with the larger mystery of life and to know that God alone is the heart's true home. People still look to priests to satisfy some of their deepest longings and most ardent desires. They search for priests when they are searching for deeper meaning. They look for priests when they are looking for God.

## PRIESTS' VISION

While people look to priests for many things, priests too are searching. They hope to find a deeper

meaning in their lives. They want to know that who they are as priests makes a difference in the lives of others.

Some priests will tell you that they are not getting what they want out of their ministries. They want a better quality of life that is grounded in faith, hope, and love. They want more joy and a deeper capacity for compassion and trust. They want more satisfaction and more acceptance. They want to be more at home with their sexuality and feelings of masculinity. They want less stress and less hassle. They want to overcome problem habits, such as smoking, drinking, or overworking. They want to come home to the depths of their calling. They want to see with new eyes things they have not seen before. They want to hear with new ears good news they have not heard before.

Some priests will admit that the hope, glory, and enchantment they once knew is gone. They may still enjoy their social status, but their giving has become stressful instead of fulfilling. They are highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of those they are serving. Trying to deal with all they encounter in the external world of ministry creates great internal stress and tension. Their disenchantment begins to leak out, no matter how much they try to prevent it from doing so. They feel blocked and limited.



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## Responsibility for self is the essential path to creativity and health in ministry

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### LOW MORALE

Behind all the priest's searchings, longings, and wants, there lies another issue that often goes undiagnosed. The issue is not a crisis of doctrine or a crisis of faith but a crisis of low morale. The United States Bishops Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, in its 1989 document *Reflections on the Morale of Priests*, defined morale as "an internal state of mind with regard to hope and confidence." The bishops view morale as more related to our insides than to our outsides. They believe morale is a beneath-the-surface issue affecting priests spiritually, emotionally, and physically. They see the quality of a priest's morale as a powerful determinant of how the priest will relate to himself and to the outside world of ministry and service: "When the morale of priests is low, the quality of ecclesial life diminishes and almost every area of church life suffers, from evangelization to vocations, from liturgical celebration to service with and to the people of God."

The bishops believe that a major factor in low morale is priests' negative and erroneous perception that they have no control over their lives and that they are impotent concerning major events and directions of their lives. In the bishops' view, low morale prevents high performance and maximum effectiveness. It limits growth in commitment and keeps priests from feeling a deep sense of joy and fulfillment in ministry. They maintain that low morale saps priests of energy for the things they were ordained to do and the things they would like to do. It hinders listening and caring. It deadens the inner life and affects negatively the outer life of service. It dulls the joy in one's life and interferes with feelings of significance

and self-esteem. It prevents digging down deep into the center and source of one's vocation and being. It prevents the development of a leadership style that is guided by a Christ-centered vision. It prevents effective involvement in the caring service of others.

Low morale, the bishops contend, cripples priests' ability to access intuitive inner wisdom and guidance for the daily task of ministry. Low morale leaks out to those whom priests serve. Priests may use the right words, but somehow they are communicating something else—perhaps even subtle messages that God and life are not all right and that there is no hope.

The bishops' document on the morale of priests implies that there is a serious and substantial problem with low morale and that the individual priest must do three things in order to inoculate against that deadly and destructive disease: (1) He must take responsibility for his life and vocation, (2) he must promote his own self-confidence, and (3) he must work heroically at being hopeful.

### RESPONSIBILITY FOR MORALE

Responsibility means that the individual priest is accountable to God, self, and others for the quality of his spiritual, emotional, and physical lives. Taking responsibility promotes emotional health, because the individual priest directs and controls his own growth in all these areas. We cannot justify blaming others for the quality of our lives. The individual priest has the capacity to increase or decrease his morale, which is a reflection of the quality of his total wellness and holiness.

No bishop, major superior, spiritual director, counselor, or anyone else outside of us can give or take away a priest's morale. "It is the priest himself who is the person primarily responsible for ongoing formation. In reality this duty of being faithful to the gift of God and to the dynamism of daily conversion falls upon each priest" (*Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, Congregation for the Clergy). Taking ownership and responsibility for ongoing formation and the quality of our morale as priests is essential for growing in the spiritual life. We must take responsibility for our feelings and our behavior, which are at the heart of the spiritual life.

Assuming responsibility for our morale is the first step toward improving our lives. The causation of morale lies within the beliefs that priests hold. Our core beliefs about reality generate our thoughts and feelings about ourselves as priests and about the world God has created, which ultimately give rise to our moods. These moods reflect the state of our morale, be it high or low.



Consequently, because priests are the creators of their core beliefs and thoughts, they must do the work of building their own morale. They must work hard at undoing and erasing any bad mental habits that contribute to low morale. They must constantly challenge any negative self-talk that may be lurking beneath the surface and reclaim and reshape the way they look at themselves, others, and their ministry. The mind is the master power that shapes our morale and determines its quality. The mind molds our destinies and our ministries. The mind can support and nourish us. Our morale is in our heads, where self-confidence and hope are born.

A short time before he died, Thomas Merton, the great author and spiritual master, challenged his audience of monks to take responsibility for their own spiritual renewal and witness to Jesus. As reported in *Asian Journal*, Merton recalled the words of a Tibetan lama who had fled his country because of Chinese persecution: "From now on, brother, everybody stands on his own feet." He implied that none of us can rely on external structures for our morale. He also implied that nothing in this world can stop us from transforming our lives, opening our hearts, loving ourselves, and sharing that love in ministry with everyone we encounter.

We are the creators of our own morale. We create whatever we believe about ourselves. Whatever we believe is what we become. All of us must take charge of our own lives and face the journey alone with the Alone. We cannot lean on others and blame them for our low morale. We cannot even expect others to tell us what to do and what not to do, because this establishes unrealistic expectations of others, which in turn becomes self-defeating and self-hurting.

It is always better to look inside for our own wisdom, energy, and vitality rather than to look outside to external persons or institutions. The answers and solutions we seek are only within our own knowing and responsibility, by virtue of who we are called to be as leaders of God's holy people. Responsibility for self is the essential path to creativity and health in ministry. It is the only way to stay healthy and to promote a positive inner transformation, which is at the source of high morale. With this approach we realize that we have earned everything good or bad that comes to us and that we cannot hold any other individual or institution responsible.

Irresponsibility prevents us from uncovering what is limiting our ability to be at peace and to be effective in ministry. Avoiding responsibility for our life situations by looking for scapegoats can only let our anguish and frustration intensify and go even deeper into our hearts and our ministries. It can rob us of an enduring depth of stability and equanimity in the midst of challenging circumstances.

Responsibility for self can bring internal peace and harmony as well as spiritual meaning and vitality to all aspects of our lives and ministry. It can even shed light on activities that previously seemed obscure.

As a very young priest, Gregory Nazianzus, in a moment of reflection and enlightenment on the need for responsibility for self, declared that "we must begin by purifying ourselves before we purify others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct others; we must become light to illuminate others; we must draw close to God to bring God close to others; we must be sanctified to sanctify and lead by the hand and counsel prudently" (*The New Catechism of the Catholic Church*). The spiritually mature priest accepts personal responsibility for his own life and morale.

## SELF-CONFIDENCE

Self-confidence arises from learning and knowing about ourselves and being courageous enough to accept ourselves as we are, with both strengths and weaknesses. Developing self-confidence, which is an ongoing process, is crucial to the priest's life and ministry. A strong self-confidence is fundamental and central to serving in an in-depth way rather than serving in a superficial way.

The quality of our self-confidence determines how much our ministry is enriching of others and transforming of ourselves. It determines the level of our openness, acceptance, trust, and love. It has an impact on how we model what we preach and what we teach. The modeling is missing from ministry when the self-confidence is lacking. High self-confidence enables us to serve with open hearts and open minds. High self-confidence gives out positive energy to those we serve.

In faith we know that God embraces our minds, hearts, and bodies and fortifies our best efforts to accept our strengths and weaknesses. We can accept all of ourselves, because through the sacrament of Baptism there is an essential goodness, dignity, and preciousness residing at the core of each priest. Through our human efforts, combined with God's Spirit, we can come to know how unique and special we are in the heart of God. Grace promotes our self-knowledge and self-acceptance, which are the elements that make up our self-confidence. God permeates and builds on our self-confidence. Grace always builds on nature and never distorts it or diminishes it.

The real challenge that confronts a priest is to allow his self-confidence to replace his negative self-judgments and fears in order for him to receive the love of God and the love of others. Can he uncover the



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## **An inner attitude of hope, arising from the priest's own talk about himself, others, and the God who created and redeemed him, is necessary for vital priestly existence and effectiveness in ministry**

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unconscious beliefs that have created his self-doubts and insecurities and begin to liberate himself from them? Can he discover that beneath his fears and false beliefs lies his true self—a temple of God's Spirit?

This is the true source of genuine self-confidence and self-empowerment, which are so necessary to model well in ministry. Our self-confidence is born out of the belief that we are capable of living and ministering as priests because we are called and can do all things in Him who strengthens us. That is a solid spiritual foundation for believing in ourselves and feeling good about ourselves. The center of our being is essentially good because Christ redeemed us and is formed in us and will abide in us until the end of time.

A deep understanding of our center, purpose, and vocation promotes a greater reason for liking ourselves and feeling safe and secure with ourselves. This deep awareness of who we are as redeemed by the blood of Jesus promotes happiness, health, and holiness. Self-confidence comes from the improvement of one's own heart, which has become incorporated into the body of Christ through the sacramental life of the church. This healthy heart becomes the lens through which he will see our ministry. Because grace builds on nature, a sense of personal adequacy and self-confidence is essential for effectiveness in ministry. Assent to God begins with one's assent to oneself, just as sinful flight from God starts in one's flight from oneself. A priest's self-

confidence determines how he assents to himself and others and how he assents to his God. To act "in persona Christi" is to live one's vocation with intense self-confidence.

### **HOPE IS ESSENTIAL**

Hope is an inner belief and conviction that in God's mysterious plan, all things will in the end make sense. It is the confident belief that all things will turn out well, regardless of how that may happen. It is being convinced that through the mystery of our union with Christ and the empowerment that flows from that bonding, God's caring love and mercy will continue in the present and in the future.

The virtue of hope is at the foundation of priestly life and ministry. Like Job in the Old Testament, who lost fame and gain and who heard voices of despair and doom, the priest is called to trust in the Lord. Like Job, he waits for God to illuminate his darkness. Like Job, he is called to look beyond the surface and see hopefully into the future.

Hopeful and optimistic priests are the best ambassadors of the Good News of Jesus as they journey with their people and listen to their questions about the mystery of pain and suffering. Without optimism, priests may well be preaching the Good News but may not necessarily be teaching the Good News. Modeling is a major component of priestly ministry, and it is often the modeling that is missing. An inner attitude of hope and optimism can make a great difference in our ministries because our parishioners have an innate propensity to imitate the behavior of their spiritual leaders. Modeling hope and optimism can be a great source of comfort and consolation for our parishioners when they are experiencing difficulty, disappointment, suffering, and disease. As Joseph Cardinal Bernardin stated in *Called to Serve, Called to Lead*, "A priest, because of the Person he represents and the message he brings, is one whose ministry is expected to bring joy, consolation, and hope."

An inner attitude of hope, arising from the priest's own talk about himself, others, and the God who created and redeemed him, is necessary for vital priestly existence and effectiveness in ministry. Modeling the belief that God can change things and that God can make a difference sends a powerful message to others. People everywhere are looking for hope. The priest's ability to model the virtue of hope carries an unmistakable conviction and makes a great impact on others who may be dealing with disease, illness, a difficult marriage, or a difficult child.

But we can model hope only if we deeply believe that God is good and caring. We can model hope only when we can see more in the future than we see



in the present. Hope is born out of the belief that God's unconditional love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Saint Paul, who as a prisoner had ample opportunity to surrender to low morale, urged his readers to find hope by trusting in Jesus. Jesus is the giver of hope, and the priest's task is to be an empty receptacle for God's gifts of love, hope, and goodness.

Nothing in the future can ever separate us from the goodness and love we have experienced in Christ Jesus, our Lord. As the psalmist puts it, "The Lord will not abandon his people" (Ps. 94:14) and "All my hope, O Lord, is in your loving kindness" (Ps. 13:4). The hope that is founded in the love of God becomes foundational for our lives and ministries. It expresses itself in ministry as kindness and gentleness, as understanding and forgiveness, as collaboration and patience, as trust and loyalty, as joyfulness and cheerfulness, as commitment and fidelity, as integrity and honesty. The love of God that we have absorbed into our very centers injects optimism. It injects an awareness that we can become more than we are because we now bear in our hearts the love of God for us. This gift of God's love for us is both self-enhancing and energizing. It enables us to live with the deep inner conviction that what we do with our lives as priests makes a great difference in the lives of others.

It is life-giving and motivating to live *in persona Christi*. It helps us keep in mind that only God is enough for the present and the future: "We walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). It propels us to live with joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

## HIGH MORALE BENEFITS ALL

Priests with high morale tend to operate with a healthy self-confidence and a joyful hope for the future. They tend to accept responsibility for their own lives rather than blame others for their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. They seem to know how to bolster their own morale with realistic expectations of themselves, others, and the God who created them. They know, deep in their hearts, that God never does for priests what they can do for themselves.

Priests with high morale seem to be more influenced by the grace of their calling and more capable of offering encouragement and hope to others. They effectively model self-confidence and hope, which sends a powerful, positive message to the people they serve and becomes a source from which those people in turn derive self-confidence and hope. They seem to be able to attain their goals and purposes in a more efficient and Christlike fashion. They seem to experience high levels of trust, acceptance, and even intimacy, both within themselves and in their ministries. Their grace-filled roots produce Christlike fruits.

Such priests live responsibly, confidently, and hopefully. These virtues make a profound difference in terms of how the priests relate to themselves and affect others. In turn, these virtues contribute to a growing sense of wholeness and holiness. These virtues prevent boredom, depletion, and burnout and allow priests to renew, revitalize, enrich, and transform themselves through their ministry.

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# Arms Out to You

James Torrens, S.J.

## A Song

What shall I now?  
Swell out for a medal,  
calmly fold my arms?  
I'm still unfinished and partial,  
still reaching toward you.

### *Refrain:*

Like a tendril up and up I go  
to the source of light.  
Like an infant I reach out and out  
to the clasp of life.

What shall I now?  
Let the world and its worry  
pin back my arms?  
Or take root on a greener prairie,  
stretching toward you?

What shall I now?  
Let my failures flatten me,  
make me droop my arms?  
I'm called to the saints as equal,  
setting sights on you

What shall I now?  
Let a gap open wider  
from my arms to you?  
Goal of our sighs, remind me  
I'm touching on you

**S**aint Anselm had a concept pretty basic to theology and to spirituality: *Deus semper major* (God always bigger). God is bigger than anything we can say or grasp. God is way beyond us, beyond our thoughts and prayers and views.

Christianity seems to modify that outlook. As Christians, don't we believe that God's heart and inner being have opened forth to us, revealed everything essential, in Jesus Christ? Yes, we do. Were we not given to know the mystery of God, hidden for ages and ages, in the coming of Jesus Christ, God's beloved son? Of course, as Saint Paul told us. And according to Saint John, do we not, in Jesus Christ, have the familiarity of friendship with God, far different from the uncomprehending status of menial servitude? Quite so.

But Jesus Christ has a depth to him, an aura, and an immense reality that elude us even as they challenge us. Scholarly efforts to sort out the humanity from the divinity of Jesus, helpful as they are in establishing the human authenticity, always keep coming up against limits. Peter's clear confession of just who Jesus is, in the gospels, has to stand with his profession of awe before the Holy One—the healer and the multiplier of the catch—and with Peter's blundering along in the days of the passion. In the Easter phenomenon—as the gospels give it to us, far

from coherently—our Lord becomes more mysterious, harder to recognize, and sudden to come and go, as well as encouraging and familiar when the disciples do meet him.

All of which is a lesson never to rest on our oars, never to think we can retire from the pursuit of God. It is our calling to stretch and reach, not to rest content with a given plateau in our lives or, worse, with the illusion of a certain control of the divine.

Each of us is a drama of growth toward God, a growth that we can twist or thwart but that is still our real dynamic. Even at our darkest, we have an impulse, like that of plants, to turn toward the light—an impulse that the poet Theodore Roethke described in his poem “Root Cellar”: “Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch, / Bulbs broke out of boxes, hunting for chinks in the dark.” We are like that toward God.

We are children with arms flung out to our source expectantly—pilgrims with arms uplifted, as Virgil put it, “for love of the farther shore” (*Aeneid*, Book VI). Yet paradoxically, we never quite attain—not on this shore. Aspiring but not arriving: what a frustration, in any sphere of our lives. Paradoxically, though, it need not disturb our peace.

In the journey of faith, we can take no step without invitation. Saint Anselm says, “I cannot find you unless you show yourself to me.” Saint Augustine prays, “Give me the strength to seek, you who have caused me to find you, and have given me the hope of finding you more and more.” Union with God is not excluded by our having to stretch; not at all. We have multiple reasons to trust, a long experience of grace and interiority.

The leading strings of the Lord (remember Hosea?) lead us along the upward way, though often through the dark, with stumbling and faltering. A day of ascent to God, a day of human life, can be grueling, with all our complaints to Providence—Why, why?—likely to go unanswered. We are in no position, perhaps, to recognize the answer. Over a long period, too,

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we can find our desires for prominence thwarted—or, if fulfilled, posing a danger to us. In any case, the worst thing we can do, at any age, is to pick an apparently safe spot, an outcrop overlooking the scenery, and just sit there, with our shortcomings and finite accomplishments.

No, aspiration is not just for the young. It is how our being responds to the Great Being, to that plenitude of love Whom we think of and call to in the most personal terms.



Father James Torrens, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.



# It's Time to Refound Health Care Ministry

Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., Ph.D.

*The current revolution in health care . . . calls Catholic health care organizations toward a refounding of the Church's healing ministry and the values that have framed that mission.* (Publication of the Catholic Health Association of the United States, 1994)

**T**he Catholic health care ministry is desperately needed today—perhaps more than at any other period of history. In particular, there is an urgent need for radically new ways to bring Christ's healing gifts to the needy. Yet this ministry, in many parts of the world, is in chaos. Problems include rising costs, the administrative burden of coping with rapid changes in medical services and funding sources, increasingly complex medicoethical challenges, uncertainty regarding the sponsorship of the ministry by founding congregations, and the closing of many once-flourishing hospitals.

How different all this is from the incredible achievements of the past! The health ministry, particularly through hospital services, had become successful beyond the wildest dreams of its founders. The words of the psalmist can be applied here: "Your favor, Yahweh, set me on unassailable heights . . . but you turned away your face and I was terrified" (Ps. 30:7).

Yet the fact of human experience, reinforced by faith in God, is that chaos—the radical breakdown of the predictable—can be a most positive experience

personally and organizationally: "Now the earth was a formless chaos, there was darkness over the deep, with a divine wind sweeping over the waters" (Gen. 1:2). Like the Israelites of old, we can use the chaos we experience to refound the health care ministry in ways that are creatively adapted to the most urgent healing needs of today, in ways that we cannot even imagine at this moment. Chaos is God's gift to us.

To explain the relationship of chaos to creativity and refounding, I first examine the interconnection of culture, change, and chaos. I then suggest ways to apply this relationship to contemporary Catholic health care ministry. Throughout this article, a series of working axioms summarize key points.

## CULTURE AND CHAOS

A simple example will illustrate the profound power of chaos—its dangers and its potential for creative action. Once, in a Tokyo subway station, I was totally lost because every sign was in Japanese, and I began to feel miserable and frightened. Could I ever find my way out? Then, unexpectedly, I noticed something in the corner of a blanket for sale in a shop window—a small kiwi, a bird that is a symbol of my country, New Zealand. Suddenly, my panic started to disappear because the symbol reminded me of so much that gives meaning to my life—my family, my friends, my country's magnificent scenery. I

regained a sense of personal belonging and identity in the midst of a very confusing situation.

Symbols in cultures are felt meanings that reside deep in the heart, not in the head; they evoke feelings, like a sense of belonging, that are impossible to articulate fully in words. The kiwi, then, acted as a catalyst for me to recall various cultural myths of my nation. Myths, contrary to the term's popular usage, are stories that tell people in nontechnical language who they are and where they should be going (see my article "Appreciating the Power of Myths," *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Winter 1987). The most profound of these stories is the creation myth of a people. In New Zealand the creation myth since the days of European settlement is this: *When the world is in chaos, there is nothing New Zealanders cannot do; in imitation of their founding people, they are especially innovative when everything seems to be against them.* By re-owning the founding story of my country, I became so energized that self-pity disappeared, and I became determined to find a creative way out of the chaos.

I did. I became Arbuckle refounded. I tore a blank page from a book, wrote "HELP" on it, and held it, without embarrassment, high above my head until an English-speaking Japanese came to my aid.

When people today re-own their creation story, they tap into the sacred creative energy of the founding experience. That energy becomes their energy in the here and now. But the paradox is that only when we experience personal or group chaos are we disposed to reidentify, purify, and re-own this founding experience.

**Axiom 1:** *An experience of chaos—the radical breakdown of the personally or culturally predictable—contains the potential for immense creativity. One then has the chance to rediscover, and be reenergized by, one's roots.*

**Axiom 2:** *The process of refounding means the return to the sacred time of the founding experience of one's culture or one's organizational culture's roots. By tapping into the energy of the founding story, we can be moved to take radically creative steps to apply the founding experience to today's most urgent needs.*

**Axiom 3:** *Just as individuals experience chaos as a normal dynamic in their journey of life, so also do organizations, whole nations, and cultures of all kinds.*

Cultures, like individuals, can lose vitality, can experience times of uncertainty and chaos, and can rediscover energy for creative action. In the midst of the chaos of the Great Depression, there emerged a Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the creative New Deal, based on the rediscovery of the dignity of the human being, inherent in the founding story of the United States. To be true to that founding story,

Roosevelt argued, the nation had to let go of excessive individualism and embrace a collaborative approach to solving problems of unemployment and poverty. Followers of Roosevelt would see him as a refounder of the nation. With the collaborative help of many people, he went to the heart of the founding story and adapted it—at considerable political risk—to the most urgent needs of his day.

## ORDER VERSUS CHAOS

Organizational cultures—in fact, all cultures—are not static entities or orderly structures; rather, they are processes involving at the same time tensions between felt order and chaos. In practice, however, people generally prefer order or the status quo, and they struggle to avoid anything that looks like chaos.

**Axiom 4:** *Cultural and personal change involve three dynamically related, cyclically repeated stages: the separation stage, the liminal or chaos-evoking stage, and the reentry stage. Generally, progress through these stages is extremely slow, filled with uncertainties and dangers. We are constantly tempted to escape from the anxiety-evoking experience.*

These stages can be illustrated through reference to my Tokyo incident. The separation stage is the phase of initial unease or malaise. In my example, this stage was the journey from the security of my hotel to the subway. Without knowing the language, would I find the subway? Once in the train, would I get out at the right station? I coped in the strange streets and, initially, in the train—just barely.

The liminal or chaos-evoking stage is sometimes rightly called the reflection stage. For me, the chaos stage began when I got out of the subway train at the wrong station. This evoked a sense of being utterly lost and generally depressed. I could no longer cope with my situation and began to panic. The chance sighting of the kiwi symbol changed all that. I was challenged to ask myself questions of fundamental importance: Why do I feel so frightened? What is my identity? What is accidental to my identity and may need to be let go? What would my culture's heroes and heroines do in these circumstances? What must *I* do, as a New Zealander, to move forward through the chaos?

The liminal stage is always a dangerous one, because I could avoid those awkward questions, perhaps by blaming others for the chaos or by dreaming of instant solutions to the chaos. Or I could own the enormity of the trauma, the psychic pain of loneliness, and the fear in order to get in touch with what is essential in my cultural founding myth. When I did re-own the founding story of my country, I became energized to move forward with patience, courage,



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## Refounding calls us to respond to the deep-seated causes of problems and to create radically new ways to deal with them

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creativity. In brief, there is a point of choice in the chaos of the liminal stage: to retreat nostalgically into past securities and stop there; or to stand still, paralyzed by the chaos and dreaming of miracles to overcome the chaos; or to move forward, with risk and hope, into an uncertain future, energized by re-owning one's cultural founding experience.

The reentry stage—in many ways the most difficult stage—involves the actual ongoing movement out of the chaos to establish a new personal, dynamic integration. It is still so easy, in the reentry stage, to give up the struggle; to fall back into self-pity, nostalgia, denial, cynicism; to give way to fantasies of unreal quick-fix solutions to the chaos; or to be overwhelmed by fear of the unknown. If one's vision is unclear, if one is not in touch with the vision within the founding experience of one's group, then one certainly will give up. The reality is that one may never see the full fruits of one's journey, yet one must begin and continue in hope.

But keeping to the task of visioning and creating out of the chaos experience runs against every fiber of our being. It requires a deep, ongoing conversion to the idea that chaos has value and that the irrelevancies of the past must be let go. We naturally seek the comfortable security of order and avoid its polar opposite, chaos. Consider how we react when even little things suddenly change in our lives. For example, how do I react when I unexpectedly find the pots and pans on the floor of the dining room, not neatly stored in the kitchen? I feel anxious and annoyed, and continue to feel this way until things are back in their "rightful" place. Order is important to most of us. Yet we confidently continue to write better and better vision statements for ourselves and our organi-

zations about our readiness to change, assuming that we and others will change without feeling discomfort or resistance. We can accept intellectually the need to change, but our desire for order can readily stop us from doing so.

**Axiom 5:** *Although the experience of chaos is the normal way in which we are stimulated to change, we so prefer the security of order and predictability that we commonly ignore the significant change opportunities of the chaos stage.*

Chaos can be a deep, innovative experience in the marketplace. Consider the experience of the giant organizational cultures of IBM and AT&T. Through government antitrust action, AT&T was broken apart, but not IBM. The latter rejoiced. AT&T's organizational culture went into the chaos stage, not IBM's. Yet it is AT&T that has since triumphed, seeing its stock rise 222 percent and winning two awards for quality. IBM, in contrast, has lost market share.

### REFOUNDING OUT OF CHAOS

To summarize, chaos can be a freeing or a subversive experience, for it breaks the rigidity of custom or habit and allows the imagination to dream of alternative or radically different ways of doing things. When people own the chaos and admit their powerlessness, they return to the sacred time of the founding of the group. There they ask fundamental questions about their origins, about what is essential to the original vision and to be kept, and what is accidental and to be let go.

Because we are human, we commonly resist the experience of chaos with all our might. Yet failure to own the innovative potential of chaos leads to the death of groups. Chaos, by challenging people and cultures to return to what is essential in their founding story, provides the chance not for superficial change but for the most profound and radical transformation. This radical transformation I call *refounding*. Thus our next two axioms, the first of which is a more precise definition of refounding than the one that appeared earlier:

**Axiom 6:** *By refounding we mean the collaborative process of returning to the original founding experience of the group in order to identify and re-own its primary purpose or vision (e.g., the carrying out of the healing ministry of Jesus) and practically adapting this purpose in radical ways to current problems (e.g., the health care needs of the poor).*

**Axiom 7:** *Renewal, unlike refounding, aims to improve only a group's traditional responses to the symptoms of problems.*

Refounding calls us to respond to the deep-seated causes of problems and to create radically new ways to deal with them. An example is local or world poverty. Renewal programs aim to improve existing methods of poverty relief, such as expediting delivery of food supplies to the poor through more efficient and speedy transport and distribution services. Refounding, however, begins with the rediscovery of the myth of human dignity. Having re-owned this foundational insight, we are inspired with the energy to invent entirely new structures and programs that tackle the fundamental causes of poverty. Thus, for example, refounding calls for radically innovative attacks on the structures of oppression, the paucity of educational facilities, and the corruption of officials.

**Axiom 8:** *For refounding to occur, collaboration of three kinds of people is required: authority position persons, refounding persons, and renewal persons.*

Authority position persons, such as managers, CEOs, trustees, or members of boards of directors, are a group's official gatekeepers to change. That is, by their position they can prevent or foster change. Their primary task is to create a proactive organizational atmosphere, or culture, that is continually expanding its capacity for creativity and encouraging innovative people, or responsible dissenters committed to the group's vision, to act for the common good. Authentic authority position persons recognize this truth and keep calling upon organizations to own their chaos, to let go of the irrelevant, and to be open to the vision of the radically new. Authority position persons accept the fact that innovation is a messy process. It involves the personalities, emotions, and peculiarities of many inventive people. Creativity does not always work neatly. In-depth culture change is slow and involves much darkness, trial and error, and evaluation.

Refounding people, with their above-average gifts of imagination, intuition, innovation, collaboration, courage, and hope, are dreamers who do, contemplatives who act. They are able to relive the founding experience of the group and, in a collaborative way, take creative quantum leaps into the present world. Passionately committed to the vision of refounding, they are not lightly dissuaded from action. The people who invented the personal computer made such a quantum leap in theory and action, as did the people who invented Post-it Notes at the 3M company in the early 1970s. History shows that refounding persons are rarely easy to be with, simply because they challenge our comfortable status quo. The reality is that an organization or culture that domesticates its rebels has won its peace but has lost its future.

Renewal people lack the outstanding gifts of refounders, but with their "nuts-and-bolts" skills and willing commitment to the group's mission, they are indispensable collaborators in the refounding process.

## SCRIPTURAL INSIGHTS

The call to refounding the ministries of justice and healing is an ongoing imperative of the scriptures. The Israelite creation myth is this: Yahweh has a special love for the chosen people; the Israelites must return this love to God, especially through worship and providing healing justice to the poor and marginalized. When the Israelites forget this message, they are overwhelmed by chaos. The exile into Babylon is a horribly painful experience of a liminality begetting massive chaos. With the destruction of the three pivotal symbols of their culture, thought to be eternal witnesses to God's abiding presence—the kingship, the temple, and Jerusalem (just as we may be tempted to think of our hospital structures today as the only places where Christ's healing ministry can be conducted)—the Israelites move into depression, anger, sadness, scapegoating, numbness, and pain beyond description: "By the waters of Babylon we sat and wept at the memory of Zion" (Ps. 137:1).

Yet once they retell how they were founded as a people in the Exodus, and admit the depth of their pain and their total dependence on Yahweh, new creative ministries of worship and justice emerge: "You heard me on the day when I called, and you gave new strength to my heart" (Ps. 138:3). Actually, in the Bible, God is pictured as allowing chaos to develop as the necessary preface for a marked creative faith response from his chosen people: "Look, today I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, to uproot and to knock down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). Or as the psalmist records: "God will scorn their leaders and make them wander in chaos. But God will lift up the poor, shepherding them like flocks. . . . Let the wise listen and wonder at God's great love" (Ps. 107:40–43).

For Christians, the creation story of their faith is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By identifying with this creation event, we become one with the mission and energy of Christ himself—a mission to be radically creative in response to the healing needs of the poor. Ponder, for example, that mysterious chaos event of Jesus in Gethsemane—an integral step in the salvation story. Jesus enters into the liminal space of the garden, a stage of intense confusion, pain, and fear: "In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). He is confronted



with three options: to escape the chaos and its lessons, or to remain paralyzed with fear in the midst of the chaos, or to move forward with hope into an uncertain and painful future.

In fact, three times he unsuccessfully tries to retreat from the chaos experience, attempting to revive the legitimate security of past friendship with his disciples—but they are asleep. Then, having failed to escape the chaos and, in the midst of his incredible inner darkness, tempted toward paralysis from fear, Jesus prays to the Father with a vigorous trust and hope that he will be spared the suffering. But he prays with detachment: “Let your will be done, not mine” (Luke 22:42).

Now notice Jesus beginning the re-entry stage. Having acknowledged his utter dependence on the Father, Jesus experiences a quantum-leap energy and creativity, in vivid contrast to his previous paralyzing fears and escape efforts. It has its source in the Father. Jesus is met by the guards sent to arrest him. Then he takes a dramatic initiative—a small physical movement, but profound in its implications for the salvation of the world: “Jesus came forward and said, ‘Who are you looking for?’ They answered, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ He said, ‘I am he’” (John 18:4–5). There is an energetic, proactive self-confidence here that was not present in the liminal stage. Jesus now personally assumes the role of both victim and priest of the sacrifice. Fear remains, but it is under control.

The scriptural insights into the nature of chaos can be summarized in the following statement:

**Axiom 9:** *Biblical chaos is not something negative. It is frequently described through a variety of fear-evoking images (e.g., fierce storms, wastelands, desert, wilderness, death, floods, illness, confusion, darkness, emptiness, void), yet at the same time it carries connotations of immense creative potentiality. Chaos provides space for God’s creative power to enter into our lives; with our cooperation, radically new and vigorous life beyond our wildest dreams will emerge.*

## REFOUNDING THE HEALTH CARE MINISTRY

The Catholic health care ministry, whose structures and methods we once thought would never need radical change, is under profound pressure from all sides. We are being forced by circumstances, often beyond our control, to move from:

- the clear sponsorship of founding religious congregations to uncertain sponsorship, due to the decline of vocations to religious life;
- a precise to an uncertain Catholic identity in the post-Vatican II church;

- self-contained health care units to collaborative systems involving cooperation with other organizations or health care systems;
- a primary emphasis on responding to the illnesses of people to fostering the wellness of people.

Any one of these changes would alone be sufficient to cause the symptoms of cultural breakdown or chaos, including fear, anger, sadness, nostalgia for the return of familiar structures and past successes, scapegoating, temptations to seek quick-fix solutions to avoid facing the pain of the chaos, and mergers with others groups just to maintain the status quo and not to improve the effectiveness of our health care systems. But all four movements are happening at the same time. Only a dramatic word like *chaos* can begin to describe the turmoil and the enormity of the pain that the Catholic health care ministry is now experiencing—and will continue to experience in the future. Yet the chaos the ministry is undergoing today offers hopeful people an unparalleled chance for refounding. The next axiom summarizes what refounding must mean for those in the Catholic health care ministry:

**Axiom 10:** *Refounding is a risk-filled journey of faith and hope, whereby we enter into the liminal heart of the Paschal Mystery itself to unite ourselves with Christ and his mission to the sick, thus energizing ourselves to be creative today as we respond in radically new ways to the most urgent health needs of people, especially the poor and marginalized.*

There are several major practical implications of Axiom 10:

**Refounding the health care ministry is a gospel imperative.** Concern for healing, especially of the poor, is at the very heart of our founder’s message. We have no choice in this matter. Once we assent to walk with Christ in the God-allowed chaos we now experience, we are to become ruthlessly honest in evaluating all our existing institutions, structures, and pastoral services in the light of his mission of healing and justice. Do they hinder or foster Christ’s healing mission today? Are there ways to express this ministry other than through the traditional structures of a hospital system? These and other questions are not easy to answer, but in the midst of chaos, we welcome them out of love for Christ’s healing mission to the world.

**Refounding is a gift of God, the fruit of prayer.** No amount of merely human effort, managerial skill, experimentation, or sophisticated communication techniques will bring about the refounding of our

healing ministry. When we pray for the refounding grace, we are praying also not to be ruled by the fear of change or the enticing security of the status quo: “Set your hearts on his kingdom. . . . There is no need to be afraid” (Luke 12:31–32). Refounding will never begin, or continue, to happen if we passively accept—out of fear of change or of being misunderstood—the status quo in the health care ministry. Jesus was fearful in the garden, but he prayed not to be paralyzed by his fear. The Father heard his prayer.

**Acknowledging our own personal need for refounding in Christ is essential.** We cannot enter collaboratively into the refounding of the health care ministry if we are not first struggling to enter into our own inner personal chaos. There we may discover our sinfulness, fears, and prejudices, and thus our own desperate need in hope for God’s ever-healing presence. As Saint Paul writes succinctly: “I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ’s power over me. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9–10). Sensitive to our own helplessness without Christ, we experience an empathy with the afflicted around us and a hope and trust in the all-loving and forgiving Jesus.

Recall a significant comment by Mark the evangelizer when he reflected on the failure of the three disciples to support Jesus in his intense loneliness in the garden of Gethsemane: “They did not know how to help him, because they did not know what to say to him” (Mark 14:40). They did not know how to help or what to say, because they had not yet admitted to their own inner powerlessness and fragility. Without having made this inner journey, they could feel no empathy or compassion with Jesus in his suffering.

So also with us: our words of refounding remain mere words unless matched by our own inner admission of powerlessness when confronted with the inner chaos of sinfulness, fears, and prejudice. Yet to experience that admission, we need time and space for contemplation. Contemplation on Christ’s journey and mission is the foundation of creativity for refounding the Catholic health care ministry.

**Discovering our role in the refounding process is crucial.** Each of us is called to the task of refounding. It is an imperative of the gospel. What is our personal role to be? The role of an authority position person, a refounding person, or a renewal person?

**Finding, placing, and supporting creative people in our healing ministries promotes progress.** Creative people are the engines of refounding. When found, their wise placement is crucial. Jesus is pastorally

alive to this: “Put new wine in fresh skins, and both are preserved” (Matt. 9:17). That is, creative people are not to be positioned where their energy for refounding will be suffocated by structures or by those who are ideologically committed to the status quo. The mission, not the status quo, has priority. Creative people must not be asked to do the impossible in the midst of unnecessarily obstructive structures and people. Hence, the next axiom is directed especially to authority position people:

***Axiom 11:** Since the process of refounding involves a break with past securities and a journey into the unknown, there is bound to be resistance, sometimes of considerable, even paralyzing, power. For the sake of the mission, this resistance may need to be bypassed so that it does not deenergize people involved in the task.*

**Developing the art of personal and organizational grieving enhances creativity.** Grief is the sadness, sorrow, denial, depression, guilt, and confusion that accompany significant loss—in fact, all the symptoms of chaos. Cultures, nations, organizations—not only individuals—experience grief. The art of grieving involves publicly expressing grief. Unless this is done, grief haunts the living, stopping them from moving forward. Suppressed grief suffocates creativity.

The Hebrew prophets are examples of skilled grief leaders. The people do not want to hear the truth: “Do not prophesy the truth to us, tell us flattering things; have illusory visions, turn aside from the way, leave the path, take the Holy One out of our sight” (Isa. 30: 10–11). But the prophets refuse to be seduced by the denial of the Israelites in grief. They passionately call the people to acknowledge their losses and to give up their attachments to them: “No need to remember past events, no need to think about what was done before. Look, I am doing something new; now it emerges” (Isa. 43:18–19).

The Catholic health care ministry has gone through, and will surely continue to go through, incredible changes, causing intense grief. Therefore, administrators must name the reality, as it is, to their organizations, remembering this powerful axiom, founded on the realities of human nature and scripture:

***Axiom 12:** The management of change depends on one’s ability to articulate the process of grieving. When loss is not acknowledged at the personal and organizational levels, its suppressed tensions will finally prove more dramatically disruptive than the social conflicts that seek to relieve them.*

Because concern for holistic healing is integral to the mission of Jesus, the church cannot be fully alive



without this ministry of healing. As Joseph Cardinal Bernardin wrote: "Catholic health care continues Jesus' healing ministry and reflects a consistent ethic of life, which requires of us a commitment to preserve, protect, and promote the physical health and well-being of all people. . . . Although illness brings chaos and undermines hope in life, we seek to comfort those who are ill, whether or not they can be physically cured. We do so by being a sign of hope so that others might live and die in hope. In this we find the Christian vocation that makes our health care truly distinctive. It is the reason we are present to believers and non-believers alike." The ongoing challenge is to maintain and develop this ministry in the midst of profound change affecting every aspect of health care services. For this we need prophetic or refounding leaders with the same qualities that characterized the innovative pioneers of our contemporary health care ministries.

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# Aspects of Religious Formation

*Maria T. Flores, C.C.V.I., Ph.D.,  
and Thomas Picton, C.S.S.R., M.Div.*

**S**piritual direction and psychotherapy: how do they work together, and how can they end up on a collision course, within a formation program? This article is based on serious reflection and personal experience regarding candidates' confusion of spiritual direction and psychotherapy. It is imperative that formation directors clarify the differences between the two forms of counseling in working with their directees. This article also revisits the dilemma of the person trained in both disciplines—whether he or she be a therapist, a spiritual director, or a formation director. Ethical dilemmas are often faced by the individual trained as both a spiritual director and a psychotherapist. Occasionally, it is appropriate to assume both roles; otherwise, making referrals to other professionals is the recommended course of action.

Although our viewpoint is rooted in both developmental and self psychology, it incorporates a systems perspective. One cannot expect the candidate to name and integrate the different parts of self without the formation system acknowledging its own fragmentation. It is crucial to help candidates use the resources that can lead them to integration, transcendency, and wholeness—to enable them to achieve a balance between their inner and outer worlds. The spiritual and psychic elements within the person, along with the concrete professions and behavioral

and emotional responsibilities outside the person, create this balance. Connecting aspects of self with basic interconnecting stories of others helps candidates transcend the limitations of systems.

## RELIGIOUS FORMATION

When a person comes to a formation house of a religious congregation, he or she does so as part of a journey to know himself or herself better. People come to be formed with all that they are and all that they do. The formation journey is designed to take an individual to the depths of self. In the process, he or she discovers many aspects of self.

The candidate is not defined by just one personality trait. He or she has many characteristics that are competing to be discovered, understood, discerned, affirmed, and integrated. The candidate may already know some of these qualities—and may have either learned to live with them or opted to deny or hide them. Additional personality traits may be unknown, buried deep within the candidate's unconscious.

The characteristics a candidate owns, likes, and uses every day are easy to recognize and integrate within himself or herself. It is difficult for the candidate and formation director to face and name aspects of the candidate's personality that are denied, but



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## Individuals seeking spiritual direction want more than an expert; they want a companion on the spiritual journey

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they must do so if psychological and spiritual growth are to occur. The unknown characteristics of the candidate are undiscoverable in the beginning. Then, as the candidate is affected by the formation incorporation process—its expectations and demands, the accountabilities and personalities involved—the process becomes the path that enables the candidate to discover all aspects of himself or herself: owned, disowned, and unknown.

The incorporation process is the path for growth in the formation program. The formation director is an important agent who enables the candidate to move from fragmentation toward wholeness and integration. The journey is an active process that interfaces the candidate with the formation director, the candidate's peers, and other members of the community. Everyone on the journey becomes a mirror for the others. The candidate moves deeper and deeper into his or her self, discovering the missing parts and integrating them into a whole. Concurrently, every other member of the community, including the formation director, is challenged to do the same.

If any one part of the whole changes, the whole also changes. Everyone involved in the formation process has the choice to change or to stagnate. The more stagnation is experienced by the formation director and other community members, the more difficult it is for the candidate to move deeper into his or her self and to name and reclaim unknown personal characteristics. The more the formation director and other community members are involved in a conjoint or parallel process of self-discovery, change, and integration, the more the entire system can move from fragmentation to wholeness.

Formation directors who deny their own frag-

mentation often develop rigorous programs that allow little time for personal reflection or become overly intrusive in the candidate's life. Such directors spend much time trying to get the candidate to conform to an obsolete norm that is not valid in the late twentieth century; they tend to take personal decisions away from the candidate and to scrutinize his or her behavior excessively. Rigorousness and intrusiveness in a formation director can lead to a candidate's hiding personal issues and difficulties from the director and other authority figures. It can also encourage the development of highly superficial personality traits in the candidate.

If, however, the incorporation process has balanced accountability structures with time for reflection and with a low level of intrusiveness by formation personnel, the result can be a candidate who is willing to share his or her life story more authentically. Formation directors are often surprised by the broken and messy backgrounds of some candidates. A director can guide a candidate to integrate his or her issues by encouraging that candidate to choose a spiritual director or psychotherapist as a useful helper on the journey.

A formation director understands that in this world of personal trauma and turmoil, of broken families and abandoned relationships, there is undoubtedly a need for both spiritual companions and psychotherapists. In a world steeped in meaningless activity—a world filled with materialism and violence as entertainment and lived reality—guidance and healing are necessary and basic to survival.

The formation director's understanding of distinctions and connections between spiritual direction and psychotherapy can deepen and enhance a candidate's formation process. The formation director is often the first to explain to a candidate the differences among professional counseling functions.

Some candidates tend to spiritualize all difficulties. Doing so can lead to a stagnation that closes the door to growth—or to the development of a subtle justification for dysfunctional behavior. Candidates who spiritualize their problems often dismiss the idea of undergoing therapy because that would involve admitting their human weaknesses and struggles. Other candidates do not yet understand how to place their lived experiences and reality before God. They may view private prayer and a spiritual attitude as unnecessary. In general, such candidates have prayed and not found it fruitful, and thus see spiritual direction as a waste of time.

A formation director might choose to refer a candidate for psychological testing, assessment, or psychotherapy. Although therapy is confidential and cannot be used for evaluation, formation personnel

may use psychological testing, reports, and assessment interviews for purposes of evaluation if release forms are signed by candidate, therapist, and formation or administrative personnel within the religious community.

Seeking an evaluation assessment from a psychotherapist after therapy has started, however, puts both therapist and candidate in an awkward position. It is unethical for a therapist to fulfill such a request, as it interferes with patient confidentiality and treatment. The candidate may feel obligated to ask his or her therapist to release information to the formation director but may request that the therapist withhold certain information.

On the other hand, the formation director may ask to meet with the therapist to discuss issues regarding the candidate, or the therapist may be asked to assist in dealing with community issues. Such conferrals can be done with the candidate present. A therapist may also intervene to resolve issues between the formation director and candidate at the request of either party.

The formation director must also respect the confidentiality between spiritual director and candidate while encouraging the candidate to deal with spiritual issues that lead to a life of Christian giving and commitment.

## **SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

Spirituality is a contemporary, philosophical, psychological, and religious phenomenon. Christian spirituality embraces the candidate's capacity for love, commitment, self-transcending awareness, and understanding, as well as the presence of the Holy.

The goal of a spiritual path is growth in a loving, holistic relationship with God. The heart of the spiritual path is a relationship with God, self, and others. For candidates, the spiritual path is the means of developing and sustaining a relationship with God, within the world in which they find themselves.

Who is qualified to be a spiritual director? That is a tricky question. Historically, spiritual directors have been persons in religious communities who, for some reason, were thought to have special gifts from God. These individuals were usually priests, but others (both men and women) have not been excluded, for the Spirit blows and moves where the Spirit wishes. Throughout history, how to follow God's ways came more from experience in prayer and spiritual matters than it did from an academic degree or clerical status. The prophets Simeon and Anna were the first spiritual guides in the New Testament. The mystics Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola were spiritual guides who left writ-

ings that show us various paths for those yearning to follow Christ's way. New books and writers in the field of spirituality proliferate today.

A person becomes a spiritual director today because he or she is asked, called, and trained to do so. An individual often becomes a spiritual director because others turn to him or her for spiritual guidance, especially in the way of prayer. Sharing personal journeys and the trials, tribulations, and obstacles to a God-centered life is still the substance of the process. Praying with others, discussing scripture, and sharing spiritual reflection are now common practice in spiritual direction, which continues to be a process of discerning God's will or plan of salvation in individuals' lives. Spiritual direction helps a person draw meaning from his or her circumstances to uncover what God is saying about the direction of his or her life.

Spiritual direction is a demanding discipline. Today's spiritual directors often hold a certificate or master's degree in spiritual direction. These spiritual companions know the journey, the scriptures, and the church doctrine, and they also have an understanding of human behavior. Yet spiritual directors are still formed in a community of prayerful people. Individuals seeking spiritual direction want more than an expert; they want a companion on the spiritual journey.

Those who do not follow a spiritual path themselves cannot really claim to be spiritual directors. Those who are spiritual companions must be people who lead God-centered lives and who know how to pray. They must also be trained in the discipline of spiritual direction. A formation director may offer candidates a list of qualified spiritual directors from whom to choose. If a candidate prefers to work with someone unknown to the director, the director may ask the candidate to check that individual's qualifications before starting the spiritual direction process.

The person seeking spiritual direction must want to grow spiritually. He or she must want to begin or deepen an active prayer life. The spiritual journey can take a person to the depth of self before God. A spiritual companion can guide and encourage a candidate on this most tender of journeys. Often, it is best if inner healing of past hurts has occurred before the spiritual journey with a director is begun. The formation director can explain to the candidate that spiritual direction sessions are usually monthly or bimonthly but can be less frequent. Spiritual direction involves growth and interpretations of how God is present in a person's life, and the relationship may continue indefinitely. On the other hand, therapy initially requires weekly work on unresolved issues and problem areas, and it usually ends after certain issues are resolved.



If a spiritual director finds that a candidate is struggling with an issue that revolves around an inner problem, he or she does not automatically refer the candidate to a therapist. For example, if a candidate is struggling with his or her sexual identity, the spiritual director gently asks such questions as, "What is your relationship with God when you deal with your sexuality? What is your image of God when you claim your sexual identity or your struggle?" Thus, the director concentrates on the spiritual aspects of the struggle, being careful to focus not on the struggle itself but on the candidate's relationship with God. If it becomes clear that the candidate cannot easily be refocused to the spiritual journey and needs to sort through his or her sexual identity issues, this is a sure sign that he or she needs psychotherapy. Probing questions about the candidate's sexual identity by a spiritual director are unnecessary and inappropriate. This principle can be applied to other problem issues as well. When a candidate comes for direction with no spiritual conversation, the spiritual director subtly tries to refocus the discussion on spiritual areas. If this approach is unsuccessful, the spiritual director is obligated to refer the candidate to a therapist.

For a spiritual director to provide psychotherapy to a candidate who comes to him or her for spiritual direction would be highly unethical. Generally, spiritual directors have the freedom to relate to candidates in multiple roles, which is not acceptable in a therapeutic relationship. A spiritual director is often a member of the candidate's community. Some directors have a salaried position and live with a candidate. They may companion the candidate at church, at meals, and at community discussions and celebrations.

It is important to mention two exceptional situations in the area of spiritual direction. The first is that under certain conditions, a spiritual director can switch to being a therapist. (All psychotherapists must have either a master's or a doctoral degree. They must also pass a licensing examination in their state in order to practice psychotherapy.) Usually, a spiritual director can tell when a candidate needs therapy. When there is a crisis in a candidate's life, the spiritual director may have to work hard to encourage that individual to consult a therapist. Alternatively, if the spiritual director has no relationship with the candidate in any other role, it would be acceptable for the director to become the candidate's therapist. Because the therapist is subject to the ethical standards of his or her state's licensing and professional organization, the therapist must make clear to the candidate that he or she cannot switch back to being the spiritual director until five years after therapy is discontinued, if ever.

The second exceptional situation, mutual spiritual direction companionship, is rare for candidates beginning the formation incorporation process. However, with the formation director's approval, it is an option. Mutual spiritual direction companionship is a desirable, collaborative, and wonderful experience for two people—a relationship that takes on a special character. Spiritual journeys are shared, and personal struggles are exchanged. The participants have had spiritual direction with others, though they may not themselves have formal training. Another form of mutual spiritual direction is participating in spiritual companion groups.

## PSYCHOTHERAPY

The basic therapy process is a means for an individual to explore his or her human dimension, unencumbered by baggage that he or she sees as oppressive or demeaning. Psychotherapy has traditionally been a profession that has avoided exploration of the spiritual journey. In its psychoanalytic form, however, therapy is a journey into the psychic depths of personal pathos. Because different religions have different practices and beliefs, a therapist is expected to leave church doctrine and scriptural interpretation outside the therapeutic office. For example, a therapist takes a nonjudgmental stance on dancing, which is not allowed in some religions. The therapist may encourage clients to dance if it helps them express themselves. Thus, the therapist does not allow religious values to influence his or her treatment of clients. The therapist knows dancing is a human act that in itself can be meaningful.

Most psychotherapy deals with specific problems a person may have, often related to traumatic events or abuse in the past or present. High stress is often related to shattered dreams in a person's life or to relationships ripped apart by life's circumstances. Disrupted marriages in families with children create great anxiety and depression in many candidates' lives. Conflicts with significant others, loss of jobs, career stresses, tragic accidents, wars, and mental illness are all the stuff of therapy. The purpose of therapy is to put such traumas in perspective, to heal old injuries, and thus to help the client live a more productive life. Moving people through pain to health and to well-being is the goal.

From the psychological perspective, significant markers of human wholeness include autonomy, independence, and qualitative development beyond autonomy. Wholeness embraces the tension between yearning for inclusion and autonomy. The yearning to belong originates out of a personal independent identity that recognizes the limitation of autonomy

as the only goal of development. Movement toward wholeness emphasizes the intimacy of mutual interdependence. A holistic person has the capacity to consciously and intentionally surrender himself or herself and risk a mutual relationship with another. Therapy helps a client move toward doing so.

Most therapists do not focus on spiritual issues with a candidate unless such issues are interfering with the mental health and well-being of the candidate. A therapist will support a spiritual belief or church activity if it helps the client live productively. For example, a client may want to talk to a therapist about his or her spiritual journey. The therapist listens respectfully to understand what is important to the client. The therapist may ask how the individual's spiritual beliefs relate to his or her emotional struggle. Again, the therapist's focus is on the healing of the brokenness of the client. Hearing about the client's spiritual journey may give the therapist information that will be useful in working toward that goal. The therapist does not attempt to guide the client religiously or spiritually.

A therapist will not typically refer a client to a spiritual director unless the therapist has knowledge of spiritual direction training. A formation director can compile a list of therapists who have knowledge of spiritual direction and offer it to a candidate who has been advised to consult one.

A psychotherapist will not attempt spiritual direction with a client. Aside from the fact that therapists are generally not trained in spiritual direction, engaging in the spiritual direction of a client in therapy would be considered highly unethical. Clarity of boundaries with clients is essential in a therapeutic relationship. A therapist is required by professional ethics and state law not to have a personal relationship or any specific social engagement with a client until five years after therapy is terminated. A secondary ethical issue revolves around the costs of therapy and spiritual direction. Psychotherapy expenses are usually covered by insurance companies. Spiritual direction costs are not covered by insurance, and they are dramatically lower; sometimes there is no charge to the directee.

## FORMATION DIRECTOR

What is the role of the formation director in the psychospiritual maturation of the candidate when the formation director has training as a psychotherapist or spiritual director? This is a critical issue.

The formation director both evaluates the psychospiritual development of the candidate and participates in the same life processes himself or herself. However, the formation director should not try to

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**The formation director must have confidence in his or her evaluation skills, so as not to coopt the therapist or spiritual director into the evaluation process**

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facilitate those life processes in the candidate as long as he or she is in the role of formation director. As an evaluator of the candidate's psychospiritual development, the formation director must ultimately determine whether or not the candidate has met the criteria of a particular religious system for psychospiritual wholeness. If the candidate fails to consistently meet those criteria in a determined amount of time, the formation director has the responsibility of helping the candidate exit the system.

The formation director is the gatekeeper for the religious system of his or her congregation. As such, he or she has an agenda for the candidate's psychospiritual growth that may or may not match the candidate's capacity and internal timetable for authentic growth.

The therapist or spiritual director, in contrast to the formation director, facilitates the candidate's psychospiritual growth. He or she bonds with the candidate in a special relationship as a soul friend who listens to, empathizes with, understands, explores, and discerns with the candidate. The therapist or spiritual director affirms the candidate's choices that are concomitant with the candidate's capacity for psychospiritual growth. Such choices may or may not agree with the formation director's agenda and timetable for growth. The problem for the formation director trained as a psychotherapist or spiritual director is that he or she may tend to coopt the candidate into a growth process that is adaptive to the formation agenda, rather than a process that authentically reflects the candidate's genuine capacity for growth at any given stage in his or her psychospiritual salvation history.

The result of adaptive rather than authentic growth is that the real issues of the candidate's



growth go underground and are covered over by the development of a religiously acceptable self. Consequently, the real issues are left to emerge later on, when the pressures of the formation director's agenda have been lifted—usually after final vows or ordination, when the consequences can be seriously damaging to the candidate as well as to the church.

The formation director must be free to be an evaluator and must not become drawn into facilitating the candidate's psychospiritual growth. The processes of evaluation by the formation director, therapy, and spiritual direction should be parallel but separate. Only at the candidate's discretion should the formation director enter into the psychospiritual process of the candidate, and then only to clarify and support the candidate's authentic process of growth—never to press the formation director's agenda. Likewise, it is important that the formation director have confidence in his or her evaluation skills, so as not to coopt the therapist or spiritual director into the evaluation process. Otherwise, the danger is that those given the mandate to facilitate psychospiritual growth may end up serving the formation director's agenda rather than the welfare of the candidate.

Finally, the formation director must cultivate a deep trust and respect for the work of the professionals responsible for the candidate's therapy and spiritual direction. Ultimately, the formation director must walk in faith with the candidate, trusting in his or her own skills as well as those of the others into whose care the candidate is entrusted.

## IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS

Basically, the distinction between human growth and spiritual growth is inseparable in a person. In every inner spiritual awakening there is a freedom to grow as a person. There is a freedom to deepen one's

relationship with God throughout the journey. A mystical moment can lead to a human commitment. A human engagement can lead to a mystical moment.

From this perspective, it would appear logical that if a spiritual companion and a psychotherapist could reside in the same person, so much the better. However, clear legal and ethical issues affecting both spiritual direction and psychotherapy do not permit this enmeshment. The integrity of boundaries is necessary to sustain the effectiveness of the parallel processes of spiritual direction, therapy, and spiritual formation. The ability to respect boundaries is a sign of good mental health. Fused and unclear boundaries are the hallmark of dysfunctional families and organizations.

If the formation criteria of the religious institution are clear and if the lines of confidentiality are not violated, then the separate but parallel processes of formation and psychological and spiritual growth will ultimately work together in the best interest of both the candidate and the religious institution. All involved are on a journey of faith, grounded in professional competence and blessed by mutual respect.



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# An Insider's Sense of Aging

*J. Robert Hilbert, S.J.*

**W**hen I reached my sixtieth birthday, it seemed to me that it was something of a benchmark in the process of aging. I expected that the next decade would give me a sense of growing old—that the decline and change between ages 60 and 70 would be considerably more evident than that in the decade from 50 to 60. At the time, I looked forward to the experience with interest, curious to know what growing old feels like from the inside rather than just reading about it or watching older people. Now, as I near my seventieth birthday, I am moved to look back over the decade to examine what it has actually been like.

Back at that sixtieth birthday, I asked a friend of the same age how it felt to him to be 60 years old. He replied, "It feels like 20, only slower." His answer seemed very apt. Thus it is that now, as I look back, I do not at first sense much change. Spelling out what has happened to me takes a bit of effort.

The aspect most simply drawn into awareness is the physical. There the amount of notable change is not great: I've experienced no major illness or organic problem. Still, physical reminders of aging exist. I've had to have bits of surgery on my hands and wrists to ease constrictions. Arthritic pains in various places have rarely required any medication, but I do have to follow a certain exercise regimen to

take care of them. I recognize that individuals vary considerably, but that summarizes the physical change as I have experienced it.

A health presentation I chanced upon some years ago included a phrase that has stuck in my mind. "After 65," the speaker said, "the motto is 'Use it or lose it.'" Prior to these senior years, I gave little attention to my physical condition. The normal routine of work and recreation had its own rhythm and motivation. I never went to doctors or had physical examinations. Now I have a felt need for an explicit exercise routine simply to maintain physical flexibility and strength and to avoid developing arthritic pain. And I've started getting regular checkups.

Even with the stiffening and weakening, however, I have begun new activities. I've taken advantage of an assignment in Wyoming to return to the practice of cross-country skiing, a sport I enjoyed as a child. Most of my summer vacations in recent years have involved camping and hiking in the mountains, equipped with tent and sleeping bag—something I never tried until age 56. Stature and strength and physical skills certainly have helped form my sense of myself, but the change in these as I grow older seems not to affect that sense very deeply.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACETS OF AGING

The psychological experience of aging is somewhat more complex. One aspect involves a shift in the meaning of time. Time seems to accelerate: the last quarter century seems to have gone by much more rapidly than the previous quarter century; the last decade seems to have passed in a couple of blinks. And I seem to have more difficulty placing events of recent years in their exact time spot.

I am more aware that much of my life is only history to young people. I went through childhood and adolescence during the era of the Great Depression and World War II. Those were my formative years, and I retain many of the attitudes and values then developed. I take pride in "making do" with little expenditure of money, in carefully maintaining items of older equipment. I still have a way of looking at prices that is based on the economy of the 1930s. I am aware, though, that fewer and fewer of the Jesuits of our communities have shared my experience—and that consequently, most do not approach life with quite the same complex of attitudes and values.

I was ordained in 1956. More and more of the priests I associate with studied theology only after Vatican II. The more recently ordained, in fact, had no experience of the church before that council. I think the tendency of us older people to talk so much about the past comes from the awareness that so many of those we talk with haven't shared our earlier experience. We are moved to talk of it lest it be lost to community consciousness, but also so that those we live with might better understand what has formed our ideas and opinions.

## FEELING PART OF HISTORY

More basically, though, I have a different consciousness about my life as it relates to time. In earlier years I had a sense that time really began in *my* time. All that had happened before I came into consciousness was, I felt, in a different realm of reality—"below time," in Frederick Buechner's phrase. Now I am more aware that my life, like the lives of those who came before and after me, spans a small part of the continuum of human life and history. This personal sense of time arises in occasional experiences. For instance, in going through a museum showing the history of Omaha, Nebraska, where I was born, I was struck by the thought that I've lived through half the history illustrated there, and I felt the continuity of that half with all that had gone before.

Not long ago, while recalling some events related to my work in the 1960s, I reflected on the profound

difference between the American national consciousness of that era and our national consciousness today. In the 1960s many, many factors came together to cause a social eruption that seems, in retrospect, to have broken the otherwise fairly continuous spiral of national communal development. That era created permanent social effects, but its spirit seems long dead.

It is hard to know quite how to express this, but remembering my participation in events that now are examined in museums and history books somehow connects me with the broader scope of history in a new way. I now experience things I learned from my parents and grandparents as real and as related to my part of history. What used to seem "below time" has now been joined in continuity with my own lifetime. My stories and the stories of my grandparents' immigration, of my mother's and father's childhoods, of my dad's chancing upon the last mob lynching in Omaha, of the First World War, and of my father's and uncles' time in military service are all part of that continuity. My life is merging into history in a way I had not perceived when I was younger. I do not know how common an experience this is, but I presume it is not unique to me.

Besides this awareness of my lifetime's continuity with the past, I also have a sense of continuity with the future, when my younger Jesuit companions will carry our Society, with its spirit and ministry, into the twenty-first century. I experience a sense of relinquishing responsibility into the hands of those who are newly charged with leadership, knowing that my own experience and thought less and less strike a responsive chord in theirs, and that remembrance of me will eventually depend on their noticing my name in the necrology. I am not yet through, of course. I still have the energy and initiative to be part of developing our life and ministry.

## TRIALS AND PATIENCE

Part of my experience has been the loss of friends who have shared the whole of my life. I buried three very close friends in three successive years—1979, 1980, and 1981. At the death of the third one, I had the very lonely feeling that there was now no friend left who had accompanied me through quite the same complex of shared experience from the beginning of my Jesuit life.

Another aspect of the psychological change I have undergone in the past decade is what I might term "mellowing"; it may even be related to what traditional societies consider the gift of wisdom that elders receive. How shall I describe it? Well, the harsh and tearing quality of some emotions, such as anger

and fear, seems softened. Years ago, for instance, when I came into a profound realization of the depth of racial prejudice in our society and in me, the experience upset me greatly, provoking bitter tears and a harsh sense of urgency. The experience made me more aware of other aspects of our culture that seemed overbearing and destructive.

I hope I have not become more tolerant or accepting of such evil. There is, however, a kind of patience that comes, that relieves some of the hurt and the harshness of response. It develops, I think, as one comes to the realization that repentance and reform, in oneself as in our society, is a work of the long haul, a work of God's grace—a realization that however urgent the need of reform, however deep the commitment to reform, it yet remains God's work, in God's way and in God's time.

Then there is the sharpening of the awareness that death lies ahead. Most of us live with some realization that death could come at any time, with the swerve of an oncoming truck or the crash of an airplane. There is, if one ever bothered to think of it, a measurable probability of death occurring tomorrow. What is different about the realization as one grows older is that there is a certainty about an end point not far ahead.

I have remarked how rapidly the last decade seems to have passed. Now, looking ahead, I can hardly expect to reach 90, and that would take only two more such decades. So a world without me in it is an imminent prospect. One thing that means is that I have already accomplished pretty much everything I will accomplish in my life. I'll add on a bit more of what I've been doing, and that will be all.

A more lively thought, however, is that beyond death is mystery. Somewhere I read of an elderly woman who, in a pensive moment, asked her daughter, "All this about God and heaven—do you really think it's true?" The daughter, a bit startled, replied, "Certainly. Don't you?" Her mother said softly, "Yes—but sometimes I wonder." I think I know what the mother was experiencing. It isn't that her faith was weaker; it was just more naked.

Having had some small exposure to philosophical and theological studies, I learned long ago to say that God is beyond comprehension, transcends human imagination or concept, is ineffable and absolute mystery. Yet I have prayed to God for years with some implicit sense of relating to One who is a personal being approximately in continuity with human personal beings as I know them. I've not used very concrete images; I don't picture God as an old man

with a beard or as anything else. But conversation with God—particularly the casual, spontaneous turning to God at odd moments of thanks or plea or offering—has always had in it the expectation that at the receiving end of what I had to say was someone vaguely analogous to my parents, for instance, though vastly greater. And even though I have held intellectually the conviction that God is everywhere and then some, I usually address God as though God were placed.

I have found, however, especially in the past couple of years, that this rather categorical sense of the party of the second part in this relationship is fading. Instead, my spontaneous consciousness finds God more and more the totally inconceivable mystery my theology has always claimed God to be. I sense that I have grown closer to God, but my mind fumbles helplessly in my inability to frame God in any way. Jesus, of course, I can imagine within the frame of the gospel accounts, but the Risen Lord, too, has passed into ultimate mystery.

So it is that any desire to imagine or think of what may come beyond the end of this life is frustrated. I know God's love and the eternal promise of that love, because I experience moments of adequate assurance of being loved. Death, however, is an impenetrable blank wall that cuts off any possible intimation of what may be beyond—if one can even think of it as "what."

A few past experiences give me to expect that when I am eventually at the brink of death, I will find myself able peacefully to let go into God's keeping. For now, however, death leads to an unknown so blank that it is without meaning.

When I say that faith, or trust, is naked, I mean that the term of that relationship is a certainty that is as yet unimaginable and inconceivable. I cannot clothe God or destiny beyond death in any thoughts or images that portray reality. The images used may poetically portray something about me and the nature of my desires and experience in this life; about the actual mystery, however, they offer nothing. At times, though, I seem to be very close to lifting the veil.



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# Assessment of Motivation in Vocational Choices

*Philip D. Cristantiello, Ph.D.*

**T**he assessment of motivation does not require inventive skill or cleverness. Keen judgment and the ability to appreciate the delicacy required in questioning a person's calling are the most important interpersonal tools. One who finds it far easier to admit to a lack of ingenuity than a lack of astuteness and tact will be well equipped to undertake the necessary and interesting work of motivational assessment.

In a recent article entitled "Psychosocial Factors in Vocational Choice" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Fall 1995), I listed ten nonspiritual attractions to clerical or religious vocations. Readers have asked how the material might be used for screening applicants and for discernment during formation. The following guidelines and cautions are offered with the hope that they will meet most readers' needs. The author remains interested in hearing from those with additional questions or comments.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CAUTIONS

**The clarification of motivation is an appropriate activity.** One must be cautious, however, not to view the clarification process as a stealth investigation, presuming deceit on the part of the applicant/candidate. In ascertaining the factors that move a person

to consider a vocation, one may presuppose some degree of uncertainty or ignorance on the part of the candidate without suggesting that he or she is deliberately hiding or camouflaging something. The development of an understanding of motivation proceeds slowly. It is fostered when cooperation and interest exist on the part of both vocation counselor and counselee.

**The wise vocation counselor views himself or herself as a listener rather than a detective.** Any hint of accusation contaminates the discourse. Inquiry prompted by suspicion turns anticipatory and leads a counselor astray through absorption with the foreseen; its inclination is toward self-confirmation. True listening, on the other hand, reflects a patient attentiveness and is less likely to create a defensive climate. When listening is careless or cursory, it loses this power. Trying to discern the basis of an applicant's motivation is not likely to be freeing unless he or she has the strength to face its true character. Thus, it is essential that the vocation counselor provide safe psychological space for listening rather than create the atmosphere of a court of investigation.

**Applicants who present themselves for consideration, whether they express feelings of worthiness or**

**not, will almost always be protective of their motives.** There is a basic identity investment in self-presentation. This makes a person vulnerable. Challenges regarding motives should be offered with sensitivity to this vulnerability in order to minimize defensiveness.

Users of the aforementioned list of nonspiritual attractions must ensure that amateurish or misguided probes do not occur. Today, nearly every adult has access to psychological information in varying degrees of depth. As a result of the popularization of psychology, many people without formal training believe that they are sophisticated enough to function as “analyst (and/or therapist) at large.” Pseudoexpertise is widespread in our society and is not, I believe, limited to the nonprofessional population. Its spread is insidious, affecting even well-meaning spiritual directors, vocation directors, social workers, and psychologists. In regard to this caution, I offer Goethe’s incisive observation: “Of two things we cannot sufficiently be aware: of obstinacy if we confine ourselves to our proper field, of inadequacy if we desert it.”

**Proper timing is crucial.** Care must be taken lest motivational challenges prematurely deter a potential aspirant or detour a wavering commitment. By establishing a continuing conversational relationship, the vocation counselor may prevent such untoward reactions.

**Check the completeness and accuracy of all background and biographical information on the applicant/candidate.** Obviously, this should precede any direct, in-person questioning or assessment of motivation. Mistakes and misjudgments are likely if this precaution is not taken.

There is a difference between verifying data and assessing for the presence of motivational elements that might sabotage or misdirect an individual’s life plan. Verifying data means establishing the degree of correspondence of the actual facts or details to the information presented. This is where a little “sleuthing” comes in. An institution’s data requirements or information-gathering practices may change from year to year or when one administrator or vocation director replaces another. Such changes can muddle the verification process.

Assessing motivation, on the other hand, depends a good deal on the manner in which you go about appraising the worth and effect of data in relation to the vocation. You must establish trust and approach the process with tact to avoid alienating or threatening the applicant/candidate.

**Do not overwhelm.** Attempting to cover all ten of the nonspiritual attractions is too comprehensive and demanding an approach. It is unlikely that each person should have to submit to inquiry regarding each of the possible attractions. Such an approach has two pitfalls: (1) it suggests that the questioner’s knowledge of the individual is too limited or superficial, and (2) “buckshot” charges seldom leave much to be reclaimed, redirected, or refined.

**Consider obtaining written responses to questions on selected items from the list of nonspiritual attractions.** Writing answers is sometimes less threatening to the applicant/candidate than responding verbally because it permits a stage of private reflection. By choosing just the one or two items that seem to be most relevant in a given case, you can ease into the assessment of motivation. Once a written response is obtained, it can be reviewed by the vocation counselor for the purpose of formulating a reply, furthering joint discussion, or providing direction. This two-step process helps to ensure that the counselor will not go off on a sterile tangent or strike a nerve. It also can help the counselor to determine whether he or she is out of his or her proper realm of assessment and should arrange a professional consultation.

**Consistent or widespread patterns of nonspiritual attraction warrant further evaluation.** What image is being publicly presented by the diocese or religious order? Does it contain or omit elements that contribute to attracting inappropriate aspirants? Does it turn off the more desirable? Are effective group processes in place to foster realistic self-assessment, monitor its course, and allow candidates to ask for assistance when it is needed?

**Do not despair if you do not see a clear motive.** An absence of definition allows for further development, whereas an excess of nonspiritual contaminants poses serious concerns. The vocation counselor must be aware, however, that an absence of definitiveness can make it tempting to try persuasion (e.g., “I see God calling you”). Encourage. Don’t lead.

## INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ACCORD

In his book *Meanings of Life*, after surveying Western views of what motivates people to work, Roy Baumeister concludes that “in the modern world, the desire to benefit and glorify the self appears to be the most effective means for working hard.” It is possible that aspirants to a Christian vocation are not immune to the concept of the self as the central value base. To what extent can you expect to completely extract a



self-serving egotism from vocational aspirations? Pure, unadulterated altruism is a rarity. Conceivably, a certain degree of vanity (as well as humility) is involved in claiming that one is called by God. Those engaged in skilled, authentic ministry are not necessarily immune to taking pride in their accomplishments. So holding out for the ideal, singular motive is likely to prove futile. What is of importance is trying to determine the degree of congruence between internal motives and publicly espoused purpose. A lack of integrity on this score merits attention.

My point is that while we can expect applicants/candidates to be people who are psychologically replete and rich, they should show an internal and external accord. Seek those who are proactive, not simply reactive—those who evidence harmony between their self-development and their vocation. Avoid those who are overcompensating for defects. Exploitive and narcissistic individuals have no scruples when it comes to holding themselves together at the expense of a diocese or religious order. Be forewarned that ingratiating and manipulative antisocial personalities are very difficult to identify and costly to maintain.

Nothing stated in my previous article should be taken to suggest that every calling has its origin in childhood or that appropriate motivation is a pure outgrowth of early development. It is also a fact of present functioning, emerging maturity, and changing life events.

## AVOCATIONAL PURSUITS OFFER INSIGHTS

I remain bemused about formators' doubts about assessing avocational interests. It may be that they view "secondary" interests as distracting or divisive and try to suppress them. Unease about such interests seems deeply implanted. It reflects a failure to appreciate that it is not only in academic or spiritual activities that commitment can be encouraged, individual promise realized or subverted, and formation enjoyed or taken on with reluctance (see my article "The Value of an Avocation," *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Summer 1993). One discovers much about men and women by learning how they use discretionary time in the pursuit of their own interests.

At some point, if it hasn't happened already, someone will say you're naive or irreverent to try to understand vocational motivation. Assertions are common that it is all mysterious and undecipherable. Don't expect to harvest support from those who take this position. What they don't know, they often consider unknowable—and for them, it probably is.

For those who believe that calls to a vocation are completely beyond human ken and therefore to be

left alone, I offer three observations. First, religious leaders show increasing interest in actively encouraging vocations. Such encouragement is appropriate and effective when practiced by those who can evaluate applicants' motivations accurately. Second, those who aspire to a vocation often volunteer their reasons. Not infrequently, they report that although their interest was longstanding, they postponed the decision to act on it because of doubt and ambivalence. Third, it contributes to better understanding of all vocations, present and future, to consider the nature of the draw. It isn't necessarily undermining to try to ascertain incentives more precisely. It is smart to learn both the authentic and the inauthentic appeal of a vocation. Such understanding helps individuals and institutions avoid needless expense, frustration, and anguish.

One final caution. When we are eager to lay our eyes level for a magnified view of someone's motives, we should not fail to wonder about our own curiosity. Even the most vigorous and alert intellect can overly immerse itself in judging others' motives. By attending to Thoreau's keen observation that "we are double-edged blades, and every time we whet our virtue the return stroke straps our vice," we're less likely to turn complacent.

*Editor's Note: In the author's previous article ("Psychosocial Factors of Vocational Choice," HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Fall 1995), the first sentence of item 5 (page 30) is a publishing misplacement and should be discounted.*

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Baumeister, R. "Work, Work, Work, Work." Chap. 6 in *Meanings of Life*. New York, New York: Guilford, 1991.
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# Family Theory Lends Support To Spirituality

*Deacon Brian J. Kelly, Ed.D.*

**T**o serve and love God is to see the face of Christ in the least of his people. But how, really, can we see Christ in the rude clerk in the supermarket, the gossiping fellow parishioner, the disobedient child, the distant spouse? Do we really see him in ourselves? Prayer is the key—prayer that is fruitful because it begins with a desire to see our own humanity more clearly.

The need to grow in self-knowledge through prayer pervades scripture and tradition. It is, for instance, a foundation of Ignatian spirituality. But there are contemporary tools, too, that can nurture Christian growth. The field of family therapy offers a blueprint for self-focus that can enrich the prayerful person's examination of conscience. It encourages a searching eye on the self-in-relation-ship and the tendencies within us that can make us blind to Christ in others. In the past thirty years or so, mental health professionals have looked at individuals and families through the lens of Bowen Theory to learn about people involved in such mutually influencing networks as families and communities.

Relationships with others are the grounds of our spirituality; in them, we must imitate Christ and live our faith. It is the ability to see ourselves as agents of

the Lord who must do his will—in the place he has put us and with the people he has given us—that speeds our way to holiness. It is also through normal human failures, in getting past our stumbling blocks, that most growth occurs. To see the plank in our own eye rather than in the eyes of others is to see ourselves as we are, and Christ can then appear in every face that comes before us.

All too often, in our humanness, both Christ and family systems say, we do not see the part we play in relationships. It is quite ordinary for individuals to be aware of how others influence them and unaware of how they influence others. We become hypersensitive to others' defects. We judge. We criticize. We avoid. We blame. We resent. We wait for others to change. And we see the sun go down each night without looking at ourselves, without examining our own consciences, only to awake the next day to judge and offend again. Yet we know that the task of seeing the Lord in others is central for Christians. The demand to love our neighbor, even the Samaritan or foreigner, is rooted deeply in the Hebrew Bible. With Christ, the commandments to love God and neighbor become inseparable, for in death Christ was entirely the love of his Father and the love of his brethren.



## THEORY MATCHES SPIRITUALITY

Seeing others as the spirit of the Lord is at the heart of Franciscan spirituality. It was the focus of Saint Clare, and it pervades the Prayer of Saint Francis: "Lord, make me a means of your peace. . . . Where there is hatred, let me sow love. . . . Where there is injury, Lord, let forgiveness be my sword. . . ."

Late in his life, when the physician who developed family systems theory, Murray Bowen, M.D., heard the Prayer of Saint Francis for the first time, he remarked that in essence, the prayer and the optimal functioning of individuals as viewed in family theory were in complete accord. What was it about Franciscan spirituality that resonated for Bowen?

The clinical evidence of Bowen Family Systems Theory—the most in-depth theory of human relationships we have—overwhelmingly supports the idea that individuals in relationship networks (e.g., families or religious, social, or occupational communities) can best be understood as single emotional units. Each member's behavior simultaneously influences and is influenced by others. Optimal functioning calls for a differentiation of self, increasing self-awareness, openness, and nonreactiveness. Bowen Theory uses the term *differentiation of self* to refer to human freedom, which is dependent on the ability to be the person you want to be in the presence of important others—people who want you to be different, who are anxiously critical of what you want for yourself, who threaten to reject you—without your being defensive or critical and without conforming. Differentiation of self is to define self rather than to be coerced and defined by the will of others.

This too is the goal of prayer, for prayer is desiring to live as God would have us live with each other. To do so means that we must cultivate an abiding attitude of friendliness to all. We must desire to neither judge nor offend others while we remain faithful to God's will. Bowen Theory would instruct people to remain in calm contact with others, regardless of their attitudes. Prayer ought to open us to Christ's peace, which produces calm contact.

If, then, individuals in the midst of an angry situation can know themselves well enough to remain peaceful and to only "sow love," they imitate Christ. If a person being attacked, mistreated, offended, or blamed can take no offense and behave without defensiveness or criticism, then forgiveness comes soon, the peace of Christ pervades, and the desire to be the Lord's instrument of peace is fulfilled. Additionally, if one can encounter others in conflict and remain openly friendly to both parties while communicating no blame but expressing the conviction that human differences are tolerable, then calm self-

focus and self-defining action by either party can lead to conflict resolution. The peace of the Lord seeks friendship, not coercion, with those in opposition—tolerance, not agreement.

Differentiation of self, entered upon prayerfully, increases the awareness of personal obstacles that interfere with love of neighbor. This kind of prayerful consideration sharpens our sense of our own humanity, providing a clearer image of what is needed to improve our awareness of others in the most spiritual and Christian sense. Most of us are not well differentiated. We are not as aware of our own motivations, actions, or objectives as we should be to live our lives as God desires. By falling into one or more of the five patterns of relationship described by Bowen—conflict, distance, cutoff, over/underfunctioning reciprocity, and triangling—we attempt to calm our anxious selves. But all these patterns are ineffective in the long run, despite apparent short-term relief. More important, they reflect failures of love and self-knowledge. A way through these patterns is prayerful—and, if possible, daily—self-examination.

## RELATING IN CONFLICT

People in conflict focus more on others than on themselves. When anxiety is high, they blame and criticize others, project their own problems on others, fight, and become abusive. Those who accused the woman caught in adultery exemplify such conflict, and Christ's response was, in essence, "Look at yourselves before you throw the stone of judgment" (Tim. 8:1–11). Criticizers, blamers, and fighters need to pray for increased awareness of self. They need to recognize that the focus on themselves must be converted from righteousness to humility—another word, perhaps, for the truth about ourselves.

To avoid conflict requires one to process feelings as an alternative to "stuffing" them or verbalizing them. The first step is to remember that it takes two people to fight—and both, as family systems theory indicates, need to be anxious, whether that anxiety expresses itself as criticism or defensiveness. Calm and thoughtful people are not critical and not other-focused. The task, then, for the critical person is to pray for calm, thoughtful reflection on self. In her book *Extraordinary Relationships*, Roberta Gilbert proposes that such reflection begins by placing oneself in God's presence and then asking:

- What is it about me that makes me less tolerant of this behavior than others seem to be?
- Are there other important relationships in my life, especially family relationships, that are similar to this one?



- How much self-control have I lost by focusing on the other person?
- Is this a typical pattern in my life?
- What are my options?
- What is the range of responses I can think of, from least to most thoughtful?

Such prayerful reflection on self involves thinking about our feelings. It is calming and can open us up to a deeper relationship with God. The more we learn about ourselves, the more we see ourselves as God sees us.

## **AVOIDANCE THROUGH DISTANCING**

The most universally employed behavior mechanism, distancing, is a form of emotional intensity present in all important relationships. It keeps us from talking about important things, from knowing others and being known. We distance in many ways. One person may avoid another because the other is trying to get him or her to change, or is critical. Or both partners in a relationship may distance overtly. As an emotional reaction, distancing is a failure to see the face of the Lord in others. According to Gilbert, signs of distancing are:

- Lengthy periods of avoidance when one is emotionally reactive
- Workaholism
- Substance abuse or overindulgence in anything
- Silent withdrawal during anxious moments
- Failure to discuss things important to self
- Trouble relating to some people in the current community or in one's family of origin

It is easy to imagine Jesus' friend Martha distancing—off in the kitchen, cleaning and cooking with all her might, but saying nothing about the lack of help she gets from Mary, who sits at the Lord's feet (Luke 11: 38–42). Much distancing can be done under the guise of giving others their "space"—seeking to get unhooked from an emotionally intense issue by denying involvement.

It would not be difficult to imagine a modern Martha in the kitchen, maintaining distance by being critical or judgmental of Mary. Criticism often fuels distancing. Jealousy, insecurity, and other feelings may also fuel our anxious actions. It is important to recognize that distancing is an anxious response—as are all the patterns of behavior we observe when one distances to seek relief from anxiety. Others notice and respond to the anxiety, usually by getting more anxious. To anxiously distance from a situation is to contribute to it. Distancing increases tension in relationships; it fosters anxiety.

To be a means of Christ's peace requires something different. Calm self-definition is called for, as always. This behavior requires what Bowen Theory refers to as differentiation, or engaging in calm, self-defining actions. This requires thinking about one's feelings and communicating to others the thoughts triggered by those feelings. When we engage others by expressing our thoughts, we are sowing God's peace, because we are functioning in relationships intimately without judgment, criticism, or defensiveness. Thinking about feelings is an appropriate goal of prayer. It is a way of knowing ourselves as God knows us. It may be helpful to recall that Christ was crucified out of love for those we are avoiding, and then to pray to see ourselves as objectively as God sees us. Distancers benefit from reflection on the following questions:

- How do I avoid people and issues in my family?
- As I reflect on each relationship, what are the signs of distancing in me and in others important to me?
- What do I do to trigger distancing in others?
- What powers or fuels my distancing? What feelings are triggered?
- What accounts for the intensity of my feelings?
- What makes distancing necessary? Is this a pattern that is consistent in my life?
- How can I increase calm contact with the object of my anxious distancing?

It is not unusual for prayerful reflection to expose a lifetime of distancing behavior. The goal of prayer is to obtain the grace to change and the patience to proceed at a rate that is tolerable to others. Bridging distant relationships takes time and sensitivity to the others involved. Gradually improving calm contact is the key to improving distant relationships. Once again, this is easier to accomplish after prayerful reflection on self.

## **EXPERIENCING CUTOFF**

Cutting off from others is an extreme expression of distancing. Any time we are cut off from significant people in our lives—whether in small ways (e.g., an apparently small choice not to see or telephone someone) or by a more dramatic act (e.g., legally disowning someone), or even through such behaviors as substance abuse, which can lead to illness and death—it is valuable to work to change it. To be cut off from a person or a section of our extended family affects our lives and is critical to our inability to see Christ in others. Undoing cutoffs is a way to open ourselves to a whole new capacity to relate to the holiness in others.



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## **We cannot see the face of the Lord in others without removing from our vision the impediments that interfere with our relationships**

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A classic example of cutoff is the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32)—the younger son who “collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country, where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.” The younger son clearly chose to remove himself from the family, and it does not stretch the parable far to believe that it was because he had trouble relating to his father and brother. His dissipation was another sign of distancing. The older son, too, was cut off, although it may appear to be in a more subtle way.

When the older son heard that the father was killing the fatted calf for the prodigal son, he became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, “Look at all these years I served you, and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast with my friends.” By refusing to enter the house, the older son distanced himself. Clearly, he felt a strong current of resentment toward the younger son, and there is a strong suggestion that he had never stated it to his father. Cutoffs can be emotional, physical, or both.

What, then, is Jesus’ word, and what would Bowen Theory note? The father—our Father—acknowledges and celebrates both children as individuals, as selves, and rejoices, in the end defining himself: “My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”

Distancing and cutoff are ways in which we turn away from the face of Christ in others. The father in the parable demonstrates the behavioral solution to distancing and cutoff. He simply defines himself to

his oldest son with kindness, and without judging or offending the son. It is important to note that his self-defining acts and statements simply explain; they are not defensive, and they do not criticize.

### **RECIPROCITY IN FUNCTIONING**

Once one can view a family or religious community as a single emotional unit, interesting patterns become clear. One is a pattern of relating in which the most obvious characteristic is reciprocity. When one person is underfunctioning, there is always a significant person overfunctioning. It may even be the person closest to or most aware of the underfunctioner. Gilbert points out that signs of overfunctioning are:

- Advice giving
- Talking more than listening
- Worrying about others
- Believing that one knows what is best for others
- Feeling responsible for others
- Helping when help is not needed
- Desiring for others what they do not desire for themselves
- Feeling burned out

Conversely, the underfunctioner tends to:

- Seek advice rather than think independently
- Seek help when help is not needed or when what is most beneficial is thinking and acting for self
- Act out (exhibit irresponsible behavior)
- Listen more than talk
- Drift without goals or fail to strive for set goals
- Have a tendency toward mental or physical illness
- Exhibit an addictive personality

It is important to remember that while both under- and overfunctioners view the overfunctioner as better off, more independent, and more actualized, this is not so. Each of the persons in a reciprocal relationship has missed seeing the goodness and strength in the underfunctioner. Each of us is gifted with a human brain that makes us capable of survival and creative problem solving. One person cannot take responsibility for another without believing and communicating that the other person is lacking in some way.

### **THE TRIANGLING PHENOMENON**

In its most common form, triangling occurs in every family. When anxiety builds in any relationship, it is easy to gain comfort by talking about a



third person, place, or thing. Comfort is thus achieved at the expense of intimacy. Triangling is turning away from the face of the Lord. Calming a relationship by focusing on a third party avoids the need to challenge self by coming to grips with the discomfort that causes one to turn away from another.

People cannot see the Lord in others if they seek comfort through triangling. Indeed, they miss a deepened sense of self, which brings with it intimacy with God's continual creative work within us. Gilbert identifies the most common signs of triangling as:

- Talking against the "boss" to people other than the boss
- Gossiping about someone who is not present
- Forming an alliance against someone
- Being overly interested in others' problems
- Thinking more about a third person while avoiding focus on self in relation to significant others

It is wise to remember that triangles are everywhere and that each of us lives in multiple, interconnected triangles. No one is immune to this automatic mechanism for managing stress. It isn't even all bad. However, the more we participate in triangles, the further we get from discovering the miracle of God within us at deeper and deeper levels. To increase our capacity to seek the Lord within others, we must experience God within ourselves at deeper levels.

Reflecting on the last two lines of Psalm 139 ("Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting") can deepen self-examination about triangling and the other patterns of behavior discussed earlier. Triangling, like all the other patterns, begins with anxious thoughts. Daydreaming and engaging in other forms of distraction are examples of triangling—seeking comfort in fantasy and avoiding the anxious now. Triangling can be as simple as being in the presence of someone with whom you have an unresolved issue, wishing you were someplace else, and being more aware of that than of the person you are with.

## REMOVING THE PLANK

The patterns of relating discussed briefly in this paper are tools for discovering how we get off course.

This article is an attempt to develop a means of self-examination based on the gospel passage Luke 6: 37–42, which directs us to remove the plank from our own eye to avoid criticism of our neighbors. It is understood that we cannot see the face of the Lord in others without removing from our vision the impediments that interfere with our relationships.

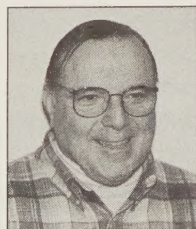
In dying, Christ wedded forever faithfulness to the Father and love of humankind. Meditating on this action of Christ while reflecting on the nature of our individual relationships can become a way to examine our consciousness of God in neighbor.

Bowen Theory takes a different approach to understanding human nature. It avoids labeling people as dysfunctional or deficient. Rather, it understands all humans to have a limited tolerance for maintaining self in the presence of anxiety.

Anxious humans behave in patterned ways. When a relationship is exposed to anxiety, both people react to it, but each is aware of the other's action and relatively unaware of the role self plays. Meditatively reflecting on the few patterns that can be used, with an eye toward seeing self as equally caught up in the anxiety, allows for a new view of self in relationship. It is a view that allows us to see the plank in our own eye.

Anyone can benefit from thoughtful reflection on, and prayerful consideration of, the five well-researched and well-documented patterns of relationships described in Bowen Theory. What could be more pleasing to God than to experience the people of God thinking and praying their way to a clearer vision of Christ among us?

There are many prayers and scriptures that help us to love our enemies, to forgive without limits, to embrace those whom we most readily judge or whom we most easily hurt. Understanding our own anxious thoughts and actions will help us achieve these goals—as will seeing others' offenses as anxious behaviors. The essential ingredient is to open to God a heart that desires to neither judge nor offend.



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# Conference Explores Critical Issues

*Sheila M. O'Keefe, Ed.D.*

**L**ast month two major psychiatric facilities in North America—Saint Luke Institute (Suitland, Maryland) and Southdown (Toronto, Ontario)—jointly sponsored a conference for bishops and religious superiors on the topic “Critical Personnel Issues.” I was fortunate to attend this three-day event in Toronto and found myself repeatedly impressed by the universality of issues confronting women and men who have committed their lives to working for the church.

In their opening comments, Canice Connors, O.F.M. Conv., Ph.D., and Donna Markham, O.P., Ph.D. (chief executive officers of Saint Luke Institute and Southdown, respectively) spoke of the ministry of service to those who minister in the church. They emphasized the need for helpers to support one another and to realize that in their weakness they are able, together, to find strength.

In his theory of psychiatry, Harry Stack Sullivan proposed the following hypothesis: “We shall assume that everyone is much more simply human than otherwise.” In my experience as a psychologist, Sullivan’s postulate rings true. At the conference, I listened as participants shared the struggles and questions that arise in the everyday living of the human condition as a priest and/or religious person. However, the sharing of our experiences in the context of faith added an element that moved our discussion well beyond the limits of Sullivan’s maxim.

Staff members from the two hospitals addressed such issues as dealing with difficult people, intervention and treatment, prevention and wellness, sexual issues surfacing among religious and clergy, ministerial placement after treatment for sexual mis-

conduct or other emotional problems, relapse prevention, and issues related to religious formation. The format involved thoughtful input by presenters, followed by small-group discussion. The program also included an opportunity to learn about different modalities of treatment through experiential learning. Bioenergetics was a new experience for me, and I learned much through participation.

In his closing presentation on “Critical Personnel Issues from a Faith Perspective,” Father Connors quoted Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins in urging us to “christen [our] wild-worst, Best.” He encouraged us all, in the spirit of Saint Paul, to find our greatest strength in our vulnerability, and to urge our communities to live by the Lord’s mandate of love. “We need to learn how to lament,” he said, and “how to lead our communities out of their darkness into their own form of resurrection.”

It was evident from the conference discussions that as a church, we are well aware of the problems confronting us today. What we may not be quite as aware of are the lessons we have learned in struggling to be faith-filled people. During those days in Toronto, I learned profound lessons about the integration of sanctity and humanness. I carried away a renewed sense of hope that we are finding a way to healing and that we are working toward the possibility of becoming as holy as we are human.

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